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MEDIATION AND THE PLURILINGUAL / PLURICULTURAL DIMENSION IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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1. TOWARDS A NEW VISION

The ongoing increase in diversity in our already culturally and linguistically plural societies offers both a challenge to the 'monolingual habitus' (Gogolin, 1994) in relation to language and language learning and also an opportunity to rethink education in general and language education in particular. We see this increasingly in the international academic literature since the so-called multi-/pluri-lingual 'turn' (Conteh, Meier, 2014; May, 2014; Piccardo, Puozzo, 2015; Taylor, Snodden, 2013), with an increasing number of academic articles on plurilingualism and translanguaging over the last decade[2]. Languages are increasingly seen as dynamically created 'composita' (Wandruska, 1979) that are subject to influences and develop over time, echoing complex dynamic systems theory (CDST), as indeed does the linguistic and cultural repertoire of any individual (Larsen-Freeman, Todeva, 2022; Piccardo, 2017). Essentially, the new vision involves moving away from the 'language myth' (Harris, 1981) of seeing language as fixed code, "an inventory of determinately identifiable linguistic units, each of which correlates a form with a meaning or meanings" (Love, 2014: 529), which just get deployed to convey a message independent of context, "as if what determines the course of the interaction were the meaning and not the dynamics of structural coupling of the interacting organisms" (Maturana, Varela,1992: 207). Instead, the contemporary view of language is integrational (Harris, 2000), seeing language as "a second-order cultural construct, perpetually open-ended and incomplete, arising out of the first-order activity of making and interpreting linguistic signs" (Love, 2014: 530).

Such a view of language and communication has a parallel in a new conceptualization of the mind. The classic Cartesian view was that the mind and body were completely separate entities, with, in more recent times, a dominant computer metaphor of input, processing and output: "the idea of a mental filing-cabinet – a store of language-like symbols waiting to be retrieved and manipulated by a centralised computational system" (Love, 2014: 528). Nowadays, the focus is on the collective mind (Gallagher, 2011; Tollefsen, 2006) and distributed cognition, with "the mental [being] inextricably interwoven with body, world and action: the mind consists of structures that operate on the world via their role in determining action. Reasoning is situated, carried out by

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[2] This chapter will not enter into discussion on plurilingualism versus translanguaging, which is considered «an action undertaken by plurilingual persons, where more than one language may be involved» (Council of Europe 2020: 31 – see Cummins, 2017, 2021 or Piccardo and Chen, forthcoming, for discussion). Suffice it to say that Google Scholar shows a slow but steady increase each year of entries for both terms over the last decade, whereas the number of entries for the older term multilingualism has declined drastically since 2015/2016. In addition, during this period, there has been a proliferation of new terms to describe particular aspects of plurilingual behaviour, see Marshall (2022), Marshall, Moore (2016), Piccardo, North (2020).

embodied beings acting in a particular physical environment [...] The mind as a controller must generate appropriate actions, in the light of an ongoing interaction between the body and its changing environment" (Love, 2014: 527). The combination of an integrational view of language and a distributed view of mind provide conceptual tools to reflect on the dynamic, superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007) and liquid (Baumann, 2000) nature of our world and the complexity underlying communication.

Language is thus seen not as a collection of interchangeable labels to be applied to objects and concepts, but rather as emerging from complex webs of actions, which all require some form of mediation. Language use/learning is a semiotic, non-linear activity nurtured by individuals' (plurilingual) repertoires and trajectories with mediation, from a socioconstructivist / sociocultural viewpoint, being at the centre of understanding, thinking, meaning-making, and collaborating (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf, Poehner, 2014 Vygotsky, 1986) – and thus at the core of acting as a social agent (Piccardo, forthcoming). This mediation may take place in various ways, through the languaging, which is discussed below. It can take the form of internal 'private speech' (talking to oneself silently to think something through) or 'collaborative talk' in a small group, in a community of practice (Lave, Wenger, 1991; Wenger-Trayner, Wenger-Trayner, 2015) or it can take the more conventional form of scaffolding by a 'significant other' (Feuerstein, Klein, Tannenbaum, 1991). Whatever form this mediation takes it will involve language and will not necessarily be confined to any one particular language variety. As Dendrinos (2006) and Königs (2015) pointed out, all languages in the repertoires of the different students are always present in the class, even if they are not acknowledged. Once we move on from the reductionist view of languages as collections of labels for objects and concepts that can simply be interchanged (nowadays with a translation tool like Google translate) we can appreciate language use and language learning as semiotic, non-linear activities in which mediation is central. Thus mediation can act as a kind of prism:

> In the same way that a prism allows one to see the different colours that make up light, mediation allows perception of the different aspects that come into play in the complex undertaking of using and learning languages. Such aspects go from the individual and social process of making meaning, through the back and forth of negotiating linguistic and cultural spaces in communication and life experiences, to the shaping and developing of individual linguistic repertoires and trajectories (Piccardo, 2022: 68).

In language education, it follows therefore, that the classroom and all other social spaces can be interpreted as spaces of collective knowledge, of shared understanding, and thus natural settings for mediation. Here the concept of 'space' can also be broadened to also include imaginative spaces of collective understanding, as in the *simulations globales* (Caré, Debyser, 1995; Debyser, 1986/96; Yaiche, 1996) found in French as a foreign language since the 1980s, as in joint projects as part of e-twinning with a school aboard, or as when students read (parts of) a novel individually and then report on this and discuss their reactions in class. The novel becomes a space of this type as soon as the student starts dialoguing with the author through reading, with this space becoming a collective one through then dialoguing with fellow students and the teacher in class. It is for this reason that the CEFR descriptors for reactions to literature in the Companion Volume are to be seen as representing a form of mediation.

2. From Language as an Object to Language as a Process: Languaging/ plurilanguaging: an act of mediation

As suggested above, language is not an entity; language is an activity, it is something we do but, more importantly, it is something we do together: "[L]anguage (even when written) is first and foremost a dialogical and intersubjective activity. Language is an activity that allows us to coordinate actions, perceptions and attitudes, share experiences and plans, and to construct and maintain complex social relations on different time scales" (Fusaroli, Gangopadhyay, Tylén., 2014: 33). Seeing language as an activity allows us to move from *language* as an entity to language as a process (*languaging*). Because language is not just a conduit to communicate a pre-existing thought. Language is an essential part of the thinking process itself, as "linguistic patterns enable the cognitive agent to construct, rely upon and manipulate 'cognitive niches': regularities, affordances and constraints that shape and support cognitive processes" (Lantolf, Poehner, 2014: 32-33).

The concept of 'languaging' has been studied by several linguists (e.g., Halliday, 1985; Jørgensen, 2010; Juffermans, 2011; Mignolo, 1996; Raimondi, 2014) and in relation to language education (Swain, 2006, 2010; Swain, Lapkin, 2011), but like mediation, it has also been studied in several other disciplines, such as philosophy (Maturana, 1988, 2000) and cognitive sciences (Cowley, Gahrn-Andersen, 2018; Cuffari, Di Paolo, De Jaegher, 2014). Halliday put the focus on the context of situation rather than the 'competence' of a person, talking of the 'meaning potential' of the situation, which van Lier called "*semiotic potential of the affordances*" (2004: 74). The concept of 'languaging' refers to the 'action in the making' as opposed to "the image of language as a conveyor of a fixed message (what exists as thought)" (Swain 2006: 95) and can be defined as "a dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning" (*ibid.*, 96) since "thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (Vygotsky, 1986: 218) and "undergoes many changes as it turns into speech" (ibid., 219).

The term 'languaging' has been further developed into 'plurilanguaging,' the dynamic, creative process of 'languaging' across the boundaries of language varieties. The term first emerged in post-colonial studies (Arrizón, 2006; Mignolo 1996, 2000), and has been used by Makoni and Makoni (2010) and Lüdi (2015, 2016) to refer to "the ongoing social process which involves a mobilization of diverse linguistic resources" (Makoni, Makoni, 2010: 261). Piccardo (2017, 2018), drawing on complex dynamic systems theory, has further developed the concept, defining it as "a dynamic, never-ending process to make meaning using different linguistic and semiotic resources" (Piccardo, 2018: 216), which implies a structured series of sub-processes: (a) a cyclical process of exploring and constructing; (b) an agentic process of selecting and (self)organizing; (c) a process of dealing with chaos; (d) an enhanced perception and awareness; and (e) an empowering process in relation to norms.

a) *Exploring/constructing*: In plurilanguaging, social agents explore new linguistic landscapes, needing to rely on mediation and intersubjectivity in the meaning-making process. In this cyclical process they build on all the resources available to mediate meaning, explore and (co)construct meaning in an augmented languaging process, as they draw on multiple linguistic resources.

b) *Selecting/(self)organizing*: Plurilanguaging involves an agentic process of selecting and (self)organizing as social agents mediate their use of linguistic and cultural resources, organizing them in a process of incremental change. As they do so, alternately exploring/constructing (forming hypotheses) and then selecting/organizing (filtering down and systemizing), both they themselves and their linguistic repertoire evolve. The process is similar to the way phases of divergent thinking and phases of

convergent thinking alternate in a cyclical way during the creative process (Piccardo, 2017).

c) *Dealing with chaos*: A system at the 'edge of chaos' can remain stable if it has high level of flexibility and adaptability (Larsen-Freeman, Cameron, 2008). Unbalance is a key feature of plurilingualism (Puozzo Capron, Piccardo, 2014) and plurilanguaging could be said to involve acting at the edge of chaos. Learning does not occur in a tidy, linear fashion; there are periods of chaos followed by *emergence* that marks the beginning of a new phase of balance. Awareness of the chaotic and changing nature of plurilingual interactions helps the social agent feel free to use flexibly all their varied resources to interact effectively, employing mediation and a high degree of tolerance of ambiguity in the process.

d) *Enhanced perception*: Plurilanguaging enhances perception, which contributes to raised awareness. Perception is related to *acting*. Van Lier considers that real learning, leading to enhanced competence – as opposed to inert learning that cannot be mobilized – succeeds through "*perception in action*" (2004: 97), so social agents need to be exposed to different affordances. Plurilanguaging multiplies the affordances presented to the social agent by exposing them to different linguistic and pragmatic systems. However, perception, and hence learning, is not automatic as a result of exposure. It is through intersubjective engagement, involving ongoing mediation, that perception and awareness increase.

e) *Empowerment vis-à-vis norms*: Plurilanguaging encourages social agents to acquire a more flexible, playful view of norms, seeing how they can be stretched or inverted. This creates new spaces "where conventional rules are not upheld, where a point of criticality is reached, [in which] new forms emerge. New forms and patterns then become the resources of the community" (Larsen-Freeman, Cameron, 2008: 102). Through plurilanguaging and mediation the social agent frees themselves from seeing norms just as barriers and constraints.

3. CONCEPTUALIZING MEDIATION AND PLURILINGUALISM IN THE CEFR COMPANION VOLUME

As mentioned above, mediation can be seen as a new prism to make the invisible visible. Through mediation we can see: the interdependence of individual and collective, cognitive and social: higher mental functions are mediated by psychological and cultural tools, *especially language* (Vygotsky's theory); the dynamic process of meaning making through *languaging* (Swain, 2006) and *plurilanguaging* (Lüdi, 2015; Piccardo, 2017) both individually and socially, that were discussed above, and the cultural/intercultural dimension that calls for developing symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2002) and critical-cultural awareness (Byram, 1997).

The concept of mediation had been introduced to language education in the CEFR 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001) in a very limited way in Section 4.4.4, an entry of less than a page, following a brief introductory paragraph in CEFR 2001, Chapter 2:

> In both the receptive and productive modes, the written and/or oral activities of mediation ***make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly***. Translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary or record, provides for a third party a (re)formulation of a source text to which this third party does not have direct access. ***Mediation language activities – (re)processing an***

> ***existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies***" (Council of Europe, 2001: 14, emphasis added).

The two aspects of mediation highlighted were then implemented in curricula and examinations in both Germany and Greece in the 2000s (Dendrinos, 2006; Kolb, 2016). However, Piccardo (2012) pointed out that the CEFR's concept of social agent suggested a far broader approach to mediation since, in its conceptual model:

> the CEFR underlines a constant movement between the social dimension and the individual dimension in the learning of a language and with this decision recognises a central position for mediation (Piccardo, 2012: 295, author's translation).

The way in which the CEFR 2001 related the individual dimension to the social dimension and vice-versa reflects the position of mediation in socio-constructivism and socio-cultural theory that has developed from the work of Vygotsky (Lantolf, Poehner 2014). While Piaget saw learning as an internal mental process, reinforced socially ('from the inside out'), from the socio-constructivist / sociocultural perspective learning is understood as first being mediated at the social level and only later reinforced through internal reflection ('from the outside in'). The conceptualisation of mediation in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020) therefore takes a far broader perspective than the CEFR 2001, though it includes descriptors for both of the aspects highlighted in the citation from the CEFR 2001 above.

Mediation is therefore introduced in the CEFR Companion Volume in the following way:

> In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities (e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional (Council of Europe, 2020: 90).

The descriptors for mediation provided in the CEFR Companion Volume are divided into three main categories, *mediating a text*, *mediating concepts*, and *mediating communication*. In relation to these three categories, (pluri)languaging takes different forms:

- in *mediating a text* social agents are (pluri)languaging to find formulations that enable understanding of the text concerned, either for themselves or for and/or with others;
- in *mediating concepts*, they are (pluri)languaging as they think things through together, helping the development of the process, articulating thoughts and developing concepts;
- in *mediating communication* they are (pluri)languaging in the process of self-other regulation, assisting this process by providing a suitable space, helping to identify common ground and to anticipate and/or overcome linguistic and cultural barriers or obstacles, as well as dealing with misunderstandings and tensions.

The interrelationship between mediation and the plurilingual dimension comes out very clearly in the descriptors for both mediation and plurilingual competence. The fact that mediation is informed by the plurilingual/pluricultural dimension is visible in many of the descriptors from the different mediation scales. For example, the following mediation descriptors focus on the pluricultural and relational aspects, as well as emotional, linguistic and cognitive ones:

- Can collaborate with *people from other backgrounds, showing interest and empathy* by asking and answering simple questions, formulating and responding to suggestions, asking whether people agree, and proposing alternative approaches. (B1; 'Overall mediation');
- Can *encourage a shared communication culture* by expressing understanding and appreciation of different ideas, feelings and viewpoints, and inviting participants to contribute and react to each other's ideas. (B2; 'Facilitating pluricultural space');
- Can act effectively as a mediator, helping to maintain positive interaction by *interpreting different perspectives, managing ambiguity, anticipating misunderstandings*_and intervening diplomatically in order to redirect the conversation. Can build on different contributions to a discussion, stimulating reasoning with a series of questions (C1; 'Overall mediation')

In turn, mediation is at the core of descriptors for plurilingual and pluricultural competence. For example, in the scale 'Building on plurilingual repertoire' social agent mobilizes their repertoire in different languages:

- For a purpose, explaining a problem or asking for clarification:

  Can mobilise their limited repertoire in different languages in order to *explain a problem or to ask for help or clarification*. (A2).

- To facilitate comprehension with between third parties (B2) by acting as a mediator across languages:

  Can alternate efficiently between languages in their plurilingual repertoire in order to *facilitate comprehension with and between third parties who lack a common language*;

  Can alternate between languages in their plurilingual repertoire in order to *communicate specialized information and issues* on a subject in their field of interest to different interlocutors.

- To create the conditions for others to use different languages (B2), role modelling openness to linguistic plurality:

  Can make use of different languages in their plurilingual repertoire to *encourage other people to use the language in which they feel more comfortable*.

- To facilitate communication by using all their agency in a multilingual context, in which they can alternate between languages and also employ different forms of linguistic/textual mediation (C1) by mediating between people in a particular social context:

  Can alternate between languages flexibly to facilitate communication in a multilingual context, *summarising and glossing* in different languages in their plurilingual repertoire *contributions to the discussion and texts referred to*.

Can *support comprehension and discussion of a text* spoken, signed or written in one language by *explaining, summarising, clarifying and expanding it* in another language in their plurilingual repertoire.

Can use and *explain specialized terminology* from another language in their plurilingual repertoire more familiar to the interlocutor(s), *in order to improve understanding in a discussion* of abstract and specialized topics.

Mediation allows learners to put their plurilingual repertoire into action, but this requires an action-oriented approach (AoA):

> The AoA implies a move from a paradigm of linearity and simplification focusing on knowledge to a paradigm of complexity focusing on competence, where the object of study (language), the subject learning it (language user), the action (language use) and the reflection (metacognitive/metalinguistic phase) are interconnected and interdependent (Piccardo, North, 2019: 52).

In the following section, I discuss how, with descriptors to guide the development of action-oriented, plurilingual tasks and scenarios, one can enhance teacher and student agency, engagement and awareness of their plurilingual selves and the value of mediation.

4. Implementing Mediation and Plurilingualism through Action-oriented Scenarios

Action-oriented/based teaching (Bourguignon 2006; Hunter *et al.*, 2019; Piccardo, 2014; Piccardo, North, 2019; Puren, 2009; van Lier, 2007) emphasises the class as an authentic social context and builds on the 'affordances' (Rietveld, Kiverstein, 2019; van Lier, 2004) offered in it, with a focus on learner agency. As van Lier puts it: "language learning-as-agency involves learning to perceive *affordances* (relationships of possibility) within *multimodal communicative events*" (2007: 53, emphasis added). Learning happens as the social agent perceives an affordance in the immediate environment. As mentioned before, van Lier sees *meaning potential* (Halliday 1973) as the *semiotic potential of the affordances* (van Lier, 2004: 74) in the particular context concerned – which can be the preparation for and completion of an action-oriented task. I do not have space in this short article to elaborate on the way in which different theories have contributed to an action-oriented, mediational approach and refer the reader to Piccardo and North (2019, chapter 3) for more details.

In the action-oriented approach the teaching and learning process is best framed by scenarios in which learners as social agents have a mission to fulfil within defined conditions and constraints (Bourguignon, 2006, 2010). An action-oriented scenario is a task/project for small groups, a didactic sequence covering a series of, say, four to eight lessons, which will be mainly collaborative work in groups and intervention and input from the teacher as and when necessary:

> Scenarios are blueprints for projects and they contain one (or more) culminating, action-oriented tasks that provide the necessary coherence to the entire scenario. Users/learners are working towards a precise goal and each task implies the creation of some form of artefact (it can be a written or an oral text, or a multimedia product involving some other semiotic code(s), like pictures or graphics, etc.) (Piccardo, North, 2019: 272).

Scenarios are complex endeavours and therefore require (a) a clear, short summary overview outlining the final task, (b) articulation into a series of steps or subtasks, each with its own coherence and (c) clear 'signposting' regarding aims: why are we doing all this? What will we be able to do better at the end? The summary needs to be written in language students will easily understand, so that they can orientate themselves and assess what competences they may need to acquire or at least revise in order to be successful. In the subtasks, social agents can mobilize their competences by engaging in different communicative activities and, by performing these activities, develop general competences and communicative language competences and strategies. The signposting is provided by careful selection of CEFR-based descriptors, adapted or elaborated for the context, which can also serve to create teacher and self-assessment rubrics.

In this way, the descriptors serve a dual purpose (a) they make the curriculum visible by stating objectives and (b) they provide transparent criteria for assessment. The selection of descriptors needs to be balanced, taking account of different aspects, and disciplined – not too many! Select only about a dozen of the most relevant. In creating a scenario, selecting the descriptors is a key phase and delicate process that must take account of what can realistically be achieved by learners in a class that may span two CEFR levels. If scenarios form the basis of the syllabus, the selection of descriptors should prioritize not only the needs of this specific scenario, but, in an accumulation across a series of scenarios, relate to the broader long-term syllabus aims – often nowadays themselves also expressed in CEFR-related descriptors.

In the following subsection I give an example of one such action-oriented scenario "Storytelling for the 21st Century," intended for classes spanning CEFR levels A2, A2+ B1, from the online tool LITE (Language Integration Through E-portfolio[3]; Goodier *et al.*, 2022; Lawrence *et al.*, 2022) from the Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Reinvented (LINCDIRE) Project (Piccardo *et al.*, 2022). I will then report briefly from some recent and ongoing projects in Canada and Italy that exploit the resources produced in order to implement an action-oriented, collaborative, plurilingual approach.

4.1. *An Example Scenario: Storytelling for the 21st Century*

Figure 1. *Storytelling for the 21st century*

[3] https://lite.lincdireproject.org.

4.1.1. *Summary*

In order to encourage younger community members to actively appreciate stories, your local library is asking the community to donate some of their favourite childhood fairy tales. You take a look through your collection and decide that many of your favourites need to be updated because they are not written in English and do not include any modern morals that would interest the younger generation.

To complete this task, you will need to write an original English fairy-tale with modern twists for a 21st century child[4].

4.1.2. *Steps*

As mentioned above, the scenario is chunked down into series of steps, here seven steps, with the final step being the culminating task. Again, the steps are explained for students in target language they can understand.

Step 1: The Importance of Stories

During your childhood and thereafter, you've probably read or listened to fairy tales. Which stories did you enjoy the most, and why? Why do you think those stories are important? What lessons did you or other children learn from these stories? Tell the class about one of the traditional fairy tales that you remember from your childhood.

In this step, you will use what you already know about stories to see if you and your group can rearrange the scrambled story pieces together. Try to use your knowledge of time signals (e.g. First, Then, Finally) and other narrative clues to help you logically arrange the pieces. Now, listen to the recording of the story to see whether your story is in the correct order. Now listen to the recording again while silently reading the text. Highlight the time order signals and other common grammatical structures like tense and conjunctions that you commonly find in stories.

For homework, try to dig up some of your favourite childhood fairytales. Bring one of these to class, regardless of the language it's in.

Step 2: My Favourite Fairytale

In this step, you will share your favourite childhood fairytale with your classmates. As you read a part of your story aloud, you can use gestures, your voice, and the pictures in the book to help the group understand the story. After each one of your classmates reads their story, can you and your other group members summarize the plot? You can use a dictionary to help you understand any unfamiliar words. Also, write a list of narrative features from two fairy tales written in two different languages. Which features do the stories share? Which features are different? You can use 'Ingredients of a Typical Fairytale' handout for this activity. At the end of this step, make sure to share your findings with your classmates.

Step 3: Retelling a Story

Now that you have analyzed the narrative and linguistic features of a fairytale, in this step you will learn some vocabulary and grammar to eventually help you write your own

[4] This scenario was initially created for a German class in Canada and later adapted and used for other languages in Canada and in Italy.

story. In your groups, choose a story that we have already read in the class, and retell that story using these grammatical features. As homework, see if you can find a few more grammatical features commonly found in fairytales.

Step 4: Rethinking Important Messages

Using the handout your teacher provides, take some time to reflect on the common morals and character traits found in fairytales. Which of these lessons are useful? How might these messages need to be updated for the 21st century? Write down your findings in your notebook and then discuss the similarities and differences you and other groups of students have discovered. What changes could you make to these existing stories? For homework, start thinking about which messages you would develop in your story, which would be appropriate to children today and also would help them look at things from different viewpoints. Also, reflect what typical storytelling features you would use to tell your story.

Step 5: Writing our Stories

Now that you have come with new ideas (new moral messages, vocabulary and language features in storytelling), you are ready to write the first draft of your fairytale. To help you, you can refer to the stories and handouts that you have discussed so far in this lesson, and use online dictionaries whenever you want to find or get clarified vocabulary or language features. You can continue with your drafts at home and bring a completed draft for the peer-editing session taking place next class.

Step 6: Can you help me with my Story?

In this step, you will use the Peer Editing sheet to give and receive feedback on your fairytales. Working with a partner, provide each other with some comments and suggestions. Once you receive feedback, spend the rest of the class editing your drafts in order to further refine your story.

Step 7: Culminating Task – Traditional storytelling for the 21st Century Child

The time has come to share our stories with the community. Before you do so, you'll have a chance to practice telling your story in smaller groups. Try to use appropriate intonation, facial expression, gesture, and any other movements that can help you convey the meaning of your story and make it more exciting for your audience. When you finally feel ready, gather in a circle to hear your classmates' 21st century fairytales!

You can also upload your story to the Make a Post form, click here.

4.1.3. *Descriptors*

As mentioned, each scenario has a selection of descriptors for communicative language activities (CEFR 2001, chapter 4; 2020 chapter 3), plurilingual and pluricultural competence (CEFR 2020, chapter 4) and communicative language competences (CEFR 2001, chapter 5; 2020, chapter 5). In this project, because an emphasis was being put on mediation, which was new to the teachers involved, mediation descriptors have a separate subheading. These 17 descriptors have been selected by the team who create the scenario, often being adapted from published CEFR descriptors. A teacher using an existing scenario may well decide to reduce the number of descriptors, or to substitute some

descriptors with others more relevant to their immediate teaching context. Generally speaking, 10-20 descriptors is a reasonable number for a scenario, in order to take different relevant aspects into account.

1. *Communicative activities expressed through CAN DO statements (the "What")*

- Can understand the main points and important details in fairy tales, provided the speaker speaks slowly and clearly.
- Can give or seek personal views and opinions in discussing common storylines, character traits and morals.
- Can write straightforward connected fairy tales on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.
- Can give a prepared straightforward presentation on his/her own fairy tale which is clear enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time, and in which the main points are explained with reasonable precision.

2. *Mediation*

- Can summarize in writing the main points made in fairytales from different cultures, using simple formulation.
- Can collaborate in simple shared tasks and work towards a common goal in a group by asking and answering straightforward questions (e.g. identifying common linguistic and narrative features).

3. *Plurilingual/Pluricultural dimension*

- Can use what he/she has understood in one language to understand the topic and main message of a story in another language.
- Can deduce the message of a text by exploiting what he/she has understood from texts on the same theme written in different languages (e.g. linguistic and sociocultural features common to the fairy-tale narrative style).

4. *Communicative competences (the "How")*

a) *Linguistic (grammar/vocabulary/phonology)*

- Can use language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as fairy tales.
- Pronunciation is generally intelligible; can approximate intonation and stress at both utterance and word levels.
- Spelling, punctuation and layout are accurate enough to be followed most of the time.

b) *Pragmatic and sociolinguistic (functional/discourse, register/contextual appropriacy)*:

- Can form longer sentences and link them together using a limited number of cohesive devices, e.g. in a story.

– Shows awareness of the conventional structure of fairy tales when communicating his/her ideas.
– Can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions.

c) *Sociocultural (proximity convention, directness/indirectness)*:

– Can understand customs, attitudes, values and beliefs prevalent in the community concerned.
– Can discuss in simple terms the way his/her own culturally-determined actions may be perceived differently by people from other cultures.
– Can adopt conventions for formal presentations (e.g., oral storytelling).

4.2. *Implementing action-oriented scenarios in the classroom*

Scenarios of this type were developed and piloted in the LINDIRE project, funded by the Canadian Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) between 2015 and 2019. The LINCDIRE project developed an online platform LITE (Linguistic integration through e-portfolio), which contained four main features:

1) a bank of action-oriented scenarios;
2) a section "My Plurilingual Journey" which was a social media-inspired space provided for posting and interacting;
3) holistic reflections guided by the Medicine Wheel from Canadian Indigenous epistemologies; and
4) level checks: self-assessment of proficiency using CEFR descriptors.

Although action-oriented scenarios are not entirely new (see, e.g., Hunter, Andrews, Piccardo, 2016; Hunter *et al*, 2019; Piccardo, Hunter, 2017; Schleiss, Hagenow-Caprez, 2017), most implementations have been in relation to teaching adult immigrants, so the concept was not a familiar one to most members of the network of primary, secondary and university teachers involved. LITE, containing the scenario materials and the e-portfolio was also in the process of being developed parallel to the classroom experimentation. As a result, the LINCDIRE project itself documented a number of challenges as well as opportunities and successes. In particular, the project demonstrated teachers' need for a support structure and for continuous professional development in order to achieve the kind of shift in thinking towards the longer-term planning that working with action-based scenarios involves in a process of backward design (Richards, 2013; North *et al.*, 2018). The process of implementing action-oriented scenarios, and issues that arose in this regard, are discussed in Piccardo *et al.* (2022), in particular in Townshend *et al.* (2022).

The valuable lessons learnt in the original LINCDIRE project contributed to a very successful follow-up Canadian-Italian project designed to assist teachers in the area worst hit by the COVID-19 epidemic, Lombardy. When all teaching suddenly switched to online mode, two major and related problems that teachers working in more communicative ways faced – apart sometimes from the need to themselves rapidly acquire more advanced digital competences – were (a) how they could sustain student motivation and (b) how they could continue with pair and group collaborative activities in distance mode, rather than just offering frontal teaching plus gap-filling exercises, with the consequent debilitating effect on that motivation. Here the framing structure of scenarios,

the student agency they offer, and the 'off-the-shelf' set of ready-made LINCDIRE scenarios had the potential to provide exactly what was needed.

Between November 2020 and October 2021, in the project "*Sostenere l'apprendimento online: promuovere l'innovazione pedagogica in tempo di crisi,*" a network of 85 teachers of English, French, Spanish and German, working with some 1,500 students was set up with the Ufficio Scolastico Regionale Lombardia (USRLO), thanks to the energetic contributions of the former inspector Gisella Langé. The project goals were:

- supporting teachers' effective implementation of collaborative plurilingual action-oriented online pedagogies in language classes following sudden transition to distance learning due to COVID-19;
- using the LITE e-portfolio and plurilingual action-oriented scenarios created in the LINCDIRE project, which enable an online learning environment;
- students engaging in collaborative learning and decision-making processes and developing their strategic perspective, autonomy, and agency.

The teachers were supported by 12 team leaders, whose role was to assist their team of teachers throughout the project and to act as liaisons between the teachers and the research project teams. 20% of the teachers were working in primary schools, 29% in middle schools and 51% in high schools. The most frequently taught language was English (41%), jointly followed by French and Spanish (24%), then German (11%). The groups were made up of teachers teaching different languages. Their role was to use and adapt the action-based scenarios in their teaching contexts, provide data on the use of these resources, liaising with their team leaders throughout the project.

The main project intervention took place between February and June 2021. In this period, the teachers discussed, chose, adapted and/or developed scenarios and, supported by their team leaders and their school online platforms, succeeded in transferring an action-oriented collaborative, small group approach to the online, distance environment. The intervention took place in five parts:

Part 1: Scenario description choosing and if necessary adapting the scenario;

Part 2: Selecting relevant descriptors from the CEFR Companion Volume and the bank of adapted descriptors on LITE;

Part 3: Full development of the scenario using LITE, which involved determining and fleshing out the sub-tasks and the culminating task, and formulating descriptions for the students;

Part 4: Undertaking a reflection phase, using the relevant section of LITE;

Part 5: Assessment and self-assessment, using rubrics for both teacher assessment and self-assessment developed with the selected the descriptors, plus an overall level check, using one of the checklists for the different levels on LITE.

As a result of the collaborative work between researchers and teachers since its inception, the LITE platform boasts 30 scenarios for different levels. Teachers in Lombardy used and adapted several of these scenarios. In addition, a selected number of the Lombardy teachers prepared case studies on their experience of using the scenarios and resources in different languages. These case studies, which are presented in Piccardo *et al.* (forthcoming), capture the teachers' experience in applying the action-oriented scenarios and in using different modalities, tools, resources and strategies in that process.

4.3. *Teachers' reactions to working with scenarios*

Towards the end of the Lombardy project, in June to October 2021, a post-intervention survey and follow-up, semi-structured, individual interviews were conducted. The survey, completed by the teachers who had participated in the project, focused on the tools, resources and modalities they had adopted in using the action-oriented scenarios and LITE e-portfolio. The interviews, with 25 selected teachers, probed more deeply their experience with the action-oriented scenarios and LITE e-portfolio in order to identify successful strategies and clarify emerging issues and challenges. Interviews were carried out with teachers in Bergamo, Brescia, Lodi, Milano, Pavia, and Varese. 44% of the teachers taught English, 20% taught Spanish, 20% German, and 16% French. Data were transcribed and coded with Nvivo 12 SW by three research assistants.

To summarise very briefly the reported impact on the teaching and learning processes, four main points emerged. Firstly, in relation to resources, the instant availability and above all flexibility of the scenarios provided good access to both authentic material and authentic tasks that enabled the teachers to implement a collaborative, action-oriented approach in a distance environment. Secondly, the capacity to operationalize the approach increased greatly as technical skills were improved, leading to increased autonomy for both teachers and students. Thirdly, this effective use of technology generated interest and involvement, leading to far greater student motivation. Last but not least, teachers reported a development of linguistic abilities, especially related to writing skills and oral interaction.

In the survey, 77% of the teachers reported a strong influence of LITE on teaching practice, 91% a substantial or strong influence. 58% reported a very strong influence of LITE on teaching philosophy, 98% a positive or very positive effect. In the interviews, four main themes emerged, concerning plurilingualism/pluriculturalism; action-orientation; authenticity and inclusion; and collaboration and awareness. Here below, some of the statements made in the interviews are presented:

a) *Plurilingualism/pluriculturalism*

On plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, teachers focused on the opportunities to include languages of origin and see how learning one language can help in the learning of another:

> children from foreign countries … sometimes even say "oh, I don't remember how to say this word in Arabic because I forgot." LINCDIRE gave us, gave them the chance, the opportunity to think of their own language … and give importance. **Seeing the mother tongue as "un valor adjunto," how to say, 1 plus … something more … make them aware that their own language is a resource, even with dialect …**
>
> I have got students with different origins and some of them used the language they speak at home … for example, a Brazilian student. She really wanted to add the Portuguese to her poster. Even if we of course don't teach it. **So it was really nice to see how she could also translate that for her classmates.** And also translating from Portuguese to English. We are of course Italian mother tongue, **so was quite challenging for them and very nice for me … to see they really … added something personal.** It was, I think the best part of it.

> … also the look at the world and the other languages and the challenges **… to see how these languages are connected and how the learning of one language can help the study of the others.** I think they appreciated it.

b) *Action-orientation*

On action-orientation, the main points mentioned concern the real nature of having a mission in a task, plus the structure provided by the framing of the scenario, the descriptors and the steps:

> **The action-oriented means giving them a real task** … they work on something that is … not only a rule to learn or … a simple exercise, but something that they're going to come to build something real that will be of help for themselves and for others. Because after finishing the product … we hung the posters in the corridor for everyone to look at. **So, it was something real. And they had a target again, they had an objective, a real task. So, more involving for them, more interesting**.
>
> I really appreciated the structure, the thing that they were organized in steps. So, **it gave a precise idea for me as a teacher, but also for the students to go through the different steps** and to be more aware. …**The descriptors gave me a more detailed approach** … we had the opportunity to reflect on each descriptor and to be more aware of what me as a teacher was doing but also the students.
>
> … the teaching process. … **was very well defined and structured, in the steps, in terms of the time spent, the activity.**
>
> The methodology is very interesting and very valid because it starts from the awareness of the learning process … it helped me to be more aware of what I was doing and in the specific part of the evaluation rubric, and the self-evaluation, and the descriptors. All these parts which you know I have already in my mind. But … **the scenario helped me in a more clear way know what I was doing**.

c) *Authenticity and Inclusion*

Students also had the chance to us language more naturally, to feel that they belonged, even if their English was not perfect:

> … **this is for them an opportunity to be more natural and to use a foreign language, with difficulty, but to use it more naturally.** That's not exactly what always happens at school. And that's a very motivating factor, and that what is more important. Because I see that even the students with more difficulties when they are motivated to do something, they out of the blue become very good. … So, they are young and their English is not so good. But they could understand the situation … and they were very proud of it. … a real life situation.
>
> The few students who had, you know, come from these countries, uh, who, felt very different were made to feel important in the group, so I think it was a, you know, something useful for them, because sometimes they feel a little bit, you know different from the others because they have these foreign

origins while in this situation **they live these origins as a plus as something that could, you know, give something to the group to the class**.

… **the students with special needs really wanted to participate and to take the same part as all the other ones. And so, they did everything,** and they want it to ask and be asked for help. And so, they went out of the class to repeat it before shooting the little video because they really wanted to do that. And if that video was not good enough, they wanted to repeat it and I said: "OK, come on, you're not an actor." So it doesn't matter, but they wanted it and they did it over and over and again. And so it was really inclusive, really *inclusive."*

d) *Collaboration and Awareness*

Finally, the scenarios offered the opportunity for students to do something together and become actors of their learning process, of which they became aware and to which they responded with enthusiasm:

What I liked the most was the involvement of students and the fact that they could really collaborate. I saw them as a group. I think that the project helps them to know each other better and to help each other in the areas….

… it helped students to collaborate to work together too. Share tasks and responsibilities, especially in a period … like this where they do not have so many opportunities of meeting and staying together.

… the important thing is to be aware, and also because **they can be the actors of their learning process themselves**. They don't depend on others because they could be more responsible of what they're doing and how

The opportunity for a greater and more active emotional involvement of the children is very nice. ALL (and I mean ALL) responded with enthusiasm for the realization of the final product and the short video that they filmed and acted in.

5. CONCLUSION

In recent years, significant advances have been made in a number of fields regarding seeing the true nature of language as a process rather than an object, the situated nature of *languaging*: "While integrational, dialogical and distributed-ecological frames all differ, they all treat languaging as activity with individual, social and ecological consequences" (Cowley, 2017: 53). At the same time, complexity theories are acquiring acceptance in our field, partly due to the worldwide increase of linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide, as people realise the interconnectedness and complexity of all phenomena, including language and language use, rather than continuing to dissect them into 'pure' entities and 'simple' elements. Mediation as a concept offers the possibility of a shift of paradigm in the everyday reality of teachers' practices, with increased reflection on what it means and what it can bring to be plurilingual. Seeing mediation at the core of plurilanguaging highlights the full potential of plurilingualism, since a plurilingual mindset facilitates the perception of affordances, rendering them more visible, a process that can lead to a

positive spiral of openness to and exploitation of exploration and experimentation – balanced by reflection and systematization.

Plurilingualism is fundamentally a question of attitude, of worldview. An action-oriented plurilingual vision can help to break down the myth of the 'pureness' of languages and cultures as well as stimulating motivation in multilingual classrooms – face-to-face or virtual. The mediation that individuals undertake when (pluri)languaging opens up the possibility of a new positioning vis-à-vis languages, communication and their own worldview. Plurilingualism empowers individuals to see possibilities where others see barriers. It helps them to positively conceptualize difference as the nurturing feature of our increasingly diverse societies. Descriptors, such as those in the CEFR Companion Volume, that articulate plurilingualism and mediation into different aspects can, whilst not claiming to be 'perfect,' inspire a recognition of the importance of these concepts in the language class, contribute to moving from a perspective of deficiency perspective – vis-à-vis the mythical native-speaker – to a proficiency perspective – recognizing what learners can achieve when they can access all their repertoire – and so contribute to pedagogical change.

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