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Challenges for multicultural and plurilingual learning. Policies and practices in Andalusia

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Introduction

The realities of plurilingual learning and multicultural education are among the priorities of current educational administrations throughout Spain. In Andalusia, specifically, this prioritisation comes in response to increasingly larger numbers of foreign learners in classrooms as well as in answer to the promotion of the adoption of innovative approaches to foreign language (L2) learning and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), whereby instruction traditionally undertaken in the mother tongue is provided through another language, most frequently English. Each of these two realities of multiculturalism and plurilingualism bring with them their own inherent challenges and opportunities; at the same time, however, there are common areas related to both which are of potential interest to teachers.

The existing relationship between language and culture is well established. Numerous studies (Liddicoat *et al*. 2003; Savignon & Sysoyev 2005; Schulz 2007) have pointed to the inseparability of these two aspects. Language and culture have mutually influential attributes; the development of a target language affects perceptions towards the target culture, while cultural patterns are often explicitly coded in the language (Corral-Robles *et al*, 2017).

The fact that language is deeply embedded in culture and that each language is part of a culture has not always been recognized or assumed (Long-Fu, 2001). Indeed, even within language classes, culture has often been relegated to last place in L2 classrooms (Corbett, 2003). In order to tackle these and other issues, European-wide measures have been put in place over the last decades. Language learning across Europe itself has been considered one of the cornerstones of the European project and this has led to the creation of a number of important language education initiatives, including the development of the *Common European Framework* (CoE, 2001), the *Companion Volume* (CoE, 2020) and initiatives in CLIL (European Commission, 2006).

At the national and regional levels numerous measures have also been established; however, despite investment in language learning and teaching, education systems still struggle to improve language competences and embrace the multilingualism and multiculturalism of modern classrooms. The following sections, then, will examine a number of overlapping issues in terms of the current state of multicultural and plurilingual education and teacher training with a view to providing a series of recommendations that could prove beneficial to both of these areas.

Evolution of multicultural and plurilingual education

Undoubtedly, the terms multicultural and plurilingual are the product of the evolution of education in recent years. Like the introduction of new technologies, along with computer-assisted learning, synchronous and asynchronous education, these concepts have become ubiquitous in education guidelines and legislation.

Firstly, culture has been and continues to be an essential part of teaching in general as well as being specifically related to foreign language education. The acquisition of a foreign language (and indeed of one's own language) cannot be understood in isolation from culture; indeed, this culture acts as a source of knowledge and identity and as a prime motivation for (self-)expression.

Culture is the motor of society and, therefore, it is a crucial element in any plurilingual teaching process in the language classroom.

In the last forty years, life in Europe has undergone enormous changes. One major development arises from the immense cultural diversity caused by migratory movements that have brought with them a mixture of languages and traditions that have enriched our education system. Our classrooms have been filled with students from other countries who, for various reasons, have left their country of origin and have come to new contexts to which they contribute and from which they learn. We now live in a society, then, that is composed of different cultures, and it is the respect for all that defines us and distances us from societies in which racism or colonialism predominate. Multiculturalism is, therefore, an essential pillar; the basis of respect for otherness, towards those who hold different beliefs, opinions or ways of life.

It should be stated, however, that cultures do not interrelate with each other as a homogeneous block. Indeed, we can find at least two major areas when dealing with this concept. On the one hand, we have more intellectual forms of cultural understanding, which develop in relation to the appreciation of the arts and sciences; on the other, we find anthropological culture, which is related to the customs and ways of life of a group or of a given period (Úcar Ventura, 2005, p. 234). Therefore, multiculturalism occurs, not only between two or more different cultures, but also between the respective intellectual and anthropological strata of a culture.

Similarly, as previously mentioned, language is inextricably linked with culture. From the socio-pragmatic perspective, Blum-Kulka's (1996, p. 193) definition about the relationship between language and culture as "social and cultural restrictions on the use of language in its context" is accepted as standard. A society that is pluralistic and contains several cultures which coexist is a society that needs to prepare its citizens for a plurilingual scenario where languages are a vehicle of union and connection between equals; language is an element of cohesion, of rapprochement.

For Trujillo Sáez (2006, p. 112), interculturality is related to the communicative act; in other words, there is a conscious rela-

tionship between the various cultures and their respective languages. This intercultural relationship has its roots in previously created connections between different cultures which stem from pluriculturalism; here, personal identities arise as a result of experiences in the different cultures that are encountered in daily life. This can be understood in a broad sense and in all areas of life; thus, the relationship with a sports group is just one manifestation of a diverse cultural field, as is the cultural diversity found within the same state or in a national territory.

Starting from this premise, interculturality refers specifically to the relationship between the pluriculturalism experienced by individuals in their daily life and the learning of other languages:

> It is a way of participating in communication in which the interlocutors are aware of the presence and relevance of culture. They perceive, for example, that the points of view of each person come from their previous cultural experiences [...] they perceive that communication is governed by culturally defined rhetorical conventions and, given such perception, they try to adapt their communicative uses (or not) to rhetorical patterns. (Trujillo Sáez, 2006, p. 112)

The progression of foreign languages in our context has been enriched since the incorporation of Spain into the European Union in 1985, which at the time went from being a country which received tourists and foreign students and where only a minority could travel abroad to being a country where languages are valued as a means to access the jobs market, to obtain a university degree, to better compete in examinations for public sector jobs or to be admitted into doctoral studies. As a logical and natural part of these developments we encounter huge changes in language education. Here, culture is incorporated as a major part of communicative competence and communicative functions prioritised to create meaningful learning contexts in the classroom. As we can see through a brief examination of educational guidelines in recent decades (discussed below), language teaching is gradually based on purposeful practice, tasks and projects that involve not only the individual student or class, but rather, the whole educational community.

Multiculturalism and Plurilingualism in legal documents

In the General Education and Financing of the Educational Reform Law (*Ley 14/1970*), the concept of culture appears to focus specifically on anthropological culture (national, homeland, religious) and generically on the so-called educated culture or high culture (cultural training). The Spain of that era did not look outwards; at the time, no thought was given to other cultures that could coexist with their own. With regard to languages, the learning of a foreign language was discussed without provision of greater details of a socio-pragmatic nature.

Regarding the Organic Law regulating the Right to Education (*Ley 8/1985*), what stands out the most is that it refers to the right of "all Spaniards" to a basic education. There is no reference to the importance of multiculturalism or the importance of multilingual teaching contexts.

Organic Law on the General Organization of the Education System (*Ley Orgánica 1/1990*) includes in article 2.c, the effective equality of rights between the sexes, the rejection of all types of discrimination, and respect for all cultures. In this law the diversity of Autonomous Communities is understood, but no reference is made to the key role of multiculturalism. There is only one mention of the linguistic and cultural plurality of Spain, but there is no reference made to the effects of migration; allusions to diversity are mainly geared towards the cultural and linguistic diversity of the 17 autonomous communities that make up the Spanish state. Again, the legislative text applies the term culture mainly in an anthropological sense; additionally, the text leans more towards pluriculturalism than towards linguistic interculturality.

In the section related to foreign languages in *Real Decreto 831/2003*, which develops the Organic Law on the Quality of Education (*Ley Orgánica 10/2002*), the terms "plurilingual" and "multicultural" are mentioned for the first time:

> In this context, the role of foreign languages as a key element in the construction of European identity: a plurilingual and multicultural identity, as well as being one of the factors that favours the free

movement of people and facilitates cultural, economic, technical and scientific cooperation between countries. (*Real Decreto 831/2003*, p. 25694)

It is interesting to note that in this legislation there is mention of the close relationship that exists not only between a single language and culture, but between different languages and different cultures. This idea is confirmed in the section dedicated to Spanish Language and Literature, where it states that "education must promote knowledge and positive assessment of the plurilingual and pluricultural reality of Spain" (*Real Decreto 831/2003*, p. 25683).

Subsequent legislation continues with the notion of plurilingualism and multiculturalism, referring mainly to the languages and cultures of Spain, while foreign languages and cultures are seen as a secondary concern. Thus, the Organic Law on Education (*Ley Orgánica 2/2006*) establishes in article.2.g as one of the aims of the education system: "Training in respect and recognition of the linguistic and cultural plurality of Spain and interculturality as an enriching element of society". Here, the linguistic and cultural plurality refers to those aspects which exist between regions of Spain, although interculturality is accepted as a generic value to enrich society. Article 17.d is somewhat broader and has the following objective of primary education: "Know, understand and respect different cultures and the differences between people", which appears to be to be a clearer allusion to multiculturalism. Similarly, the 41st Additional Provision considers "[the study and respect of other cultures]" as one of the values that sustain democracy. However, although the literal wording also includes foreign cultures, the legislation's intention seems to be, once again, focussed on cultural diversity within Spain, since it refers particularly to the Roma culture and other groups and collectives, as well as to "ethnic minorities present in our country". Furthermore, there is no specific mention of languages and respect to other cultures in the study. The Final Provision, established a basis for multilingual education, but was subsequently annulled in its entirety.

For its part, the Organic Law for the improvement of educational quality (*Ley Orgánica 8/2013*), is only limited to modifying the aforementioned Organic Law 2/2006, and does not make any

reference to multiculturalism. Regarding plurilingualism, the new wording of the thirty-seventh Additional Provision briefly mentions plurilingual programs and the possibility of incorporating experts to meet the needs of developing plurilingualism. The considerations dealing with plurilingualism and interculturality of *Ley Orgánica 8/2013* are not substantially altered by the recently introduced modifying Organic Law (*Ley Orgánica 3/2020*). Only in the Preamble is intercultural education mentioned as one of the educational objectives linked to the 2030 Agenda.

Multicultural challenges in the classroom

Having examined the evolution of multicultural and plurilingual education in legislation, we now turn to some of the more practical implications in schools and classroom scenarios. In this sense, the treatment of multicultural issues in the classroom comes in diverse forms. Multicultural education, as described by R'boul and Camino Bueno-Alastuey (2021), is a framework within the practice of teaching that acknowledges the need to manage cultural diversity, focuses on equality for all and guarantees social justice. With this definition in mind, and within the specific context of bilingual and language education in Spain (particularly Andalusia), we can identify several areas affecting classroom practice and multicultural education.

One such area deals with the increased number of students enrolled from other countries and the levels of acceptance of these new students by members of the school community. According to estimates by the Andalusian education agency (AAE, 2021), over 102,000 foreign students were enrolled in Andalusian schools during the academic year 2021-22. A number of these students, particularly those whose mother tongue is not Spanish, require special measures of attention, which in Andalusia may include welcoming packages, programs to maintain cultural aspects from home cultures, and linguistic support in and outside classrooms. Beyond the measures in place, however, the reality of what occurs in schools may deviate greatly from administration expectations.

As noted by Duarte, García-Jiménez, McMonagle *et al.* (2020) information pertaining to migrant achievement in education in

Spain is limited; however, we do have evidence to suggest that issues do exist. In Catalonia, for example, de Miguel-Luken and Solana-Solana (2017) found that young Moroccans were at greater risk of abandoning their studies early while Latin-American students had a tendency to feel higher levels of dissatisfaction with their academic achievements. These findings may represent indirect indicators in relation to the efficacy of measures for integration and intercultural education.

Root causes behind performance indicators of this type, however, may be detected in results provided by stakeholders in schools. In Gómez-Hurtado and Coronel's (2016) investigation with four headteachers from Andalusia, interviewees perceived the management of cultural diversity as problematic and one which was treated in a bureaucratic rather than integrative way. These findings, while limited, might suggest that in certain contexts there is a need to push for more serious and non-superficial approaches to integrative intercultural education. In another study, Fernández-Batanero, Hernández-Fernández and Colmenero Ruiz (2020) point to areas of conflict and other problems in terms of integration, particularly in secondary schools in Andalusia and find limitations in terms of teachers. knowledge (and by extension, skills and abilities) to tackle issues related to immigrant students and intercultural education. As discussed at a later point in this chapter, these findings and others would suggest a need for action within pre- and in-service teacher training programs.

Pluricultural and plurilingual competence within L2 and CLIL programs

In response to the realities of linguistic and cultural diversity within European education systems the Council of Europe has promoted a number of initiatives within the field of education. Some of these initiatives are particularly visible within the treatment of language learning and Content and Language Integrated Learning.

In the first case, the latest version of the *Common European Framework*, known in its short form as the *Companion Volume*

(CoE, 2020) aims to promote reflection on plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Here, the framework encourages teachers to see learners as "pluricultural beings" and to help them to use all available linguistic resources as needed and to detect similarities and differences between languages and cultures (CoE, 2020, p. 30). This new paradigm moves away from traditional language teaching and learning competences of listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to focus on reception, production, interaction and mediation skills. It is in this last area of mediation in particular where we see possibilities for learners to become intercultural mediators and to facilitate pluricultural spaces. Competence in this area includes proficiency in aspects such as (CoE, 2020, p. 114):

- using questions and showing interest to promote understanding of cultural norms and perspectives between participants;
- demonstrating sensitivity to and respect for different sociocultural and sociolinguistic perspectives and norms;
- anticipating, dealing with and/or repairing misunderstandings arising from sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences.

The requirement for the inclusion of mediation in language learning has recently been incorporated into national and regional legislative guidelines for primary and secondary education, thus demonstrating a close link between European recommendations and more localised educational policies. The challenge, however, may come in the form of varying degrees of assimilation by teachers at school level, many of whom have training in more obsolete forms of language learning.

Another important area of multicultural learning has emerged with the adoption of plurilingual programs in schools across Spain, and in particular, Andalusia. Commonly known as bilingual schools, a large number of primary and secondary centres have come to adopt teaching programs which employ some form of Content and Language Integrated learning, whereby a limited number of specific content subjects (e.g. history, science, physical education) are taught in a foreign language or, more commonly, through a mixture of L1 and L2. Within the CLIL paradigm, Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) suggest that teaching and learning should be centred around the areas of content,

communication, cognition and culture (also known as the 4 C's). The cultural component within this framework involves awareness, understanding and respect towards different individual and cultural elements. Importantly, the framework also highlights the importance of appreciating one's own cultural identity in addition to this openness towards others.

Early studies on the adoption of CLIL in Andalusia (e.g. Mendez-García, 2011) show the potential for this type of program to help with the development of more positive intercultural attitudes, and it should be noted that newly incorporated legislation for primary and secondary curricula contemplate the cultural component as a key competence to be developed in all subject areas. Additionally, it is possible to see the implementation of CLIL proposals in a number of research and European project initiatives (e.g. SELFIE Consortium, 2021).

It may be the case, however, that while teachers of certain subjects (e.g. science) might readily assimilate the key areas of content, communication and cognition, the area of culture might seem elusive or detached from areas to be developed within curricular contents. Several studies already point to the need for more training in CLIL programs in general for pre- and in-service levels (Rodríguez-Sabiote *et al.*, 2018; Pavón-Vázquez, Lancaster & Bretones-Callejas, 2020). This need is perhaps more accentuated when it comes to dealing with the cultural component, where, in addition to the lack of research on this dimension within CLIL, studies in Europe indicate that there is a need for guidance for teachers on the integration of intercultural activities in the classroom (Cucci, 2021).

In the same line, a growing body of research (e.g., Birello *et al.*, 2021; Cabré Rocafort, 2019) highlights the difficulty of bringing in-service teachers fully on board with plurilingual and pluricultural ideologies and pedagogies, despite the promise of future opportunities withing plurilingual instruction. Indeed, teachers find the concepts of plurilingualism and multiculturalism difficult to implement in the classroom (García, 2009; Portolés & Martí, 2018). With this perspective in mind, the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity in the process of learning should be emphasized and the teacher training needs to correspond to meet social demands and needs arising from these areas (Murillo & Hidalgo, 2016).

Recent and current training programs

In order to ascertain how multiculturalism and plurilingualism is treated in the teacher training programs provided in the Andalusian region, we have conducted an analysis of the different programmes and contents offered by the different entities in the two abovementioned aspects. These programs take place under the auspices of the Andalusian system of permanent teacher training, which is organized in a network of 32 Teaching Centres (known as CEP), which have pedagogical and management autonomy under the terms established in Decreto 93/2013. This decree regulates the initial and ongoing teacher training in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia by establishing the strategic lines of action in teacher training, in accordance with the educational interests and priorities of a given time.

In this document, there are five lines of action regarding teacher training. These lines of action guide the contents of the programmes offered in the different teacher training centres. For the present year, only one course on the aspects under study, that is, multiculturalism and plurilingualism has been found ('Learning languages and content in multilingual contexts' in CEP Priego – Montilla, Córdoba, Spain). The objectives of the course are the following:

- To reflect on bilingualism and bilingual education programmes.
- To analyse the use of L1 in a second language class.
- To investigate the concept of "translanguaging".
- To propose strategies for pedagogical intervention in the bilingual classroom.

While these objectives are in line with the social demands and needs mentioned above, the offered training programmes appear to be insufficient to address the needs and cultivate plurilingual and multicultural students, despite wide recognition of the benefits of plurilingualism and multiculturalism in individual, societal and economic terms. Due to the scarce number of training activities and courses and, indeed, the limited nature of subject matter in those courses which are available, it would appear that there is a need for greater critical engagement with systemic issues of

multiculturalism and plurilingualism and for more systematic integration of plurilingual and multicultural approaches throughout teacher education programs.

Conclusions and recommendations

The treatment of multicultural and plurilingual components in education in Andalusia has taken place gradually over the span of several decades, and today, initiatives such as the adoption of common European policies on language and diversity are clearly visible. Yet, while these elements are firmly embedded within current legislative guidelines, there still remain several issues which prevent them from being delivered in optimal conditions in classroom settings.

Within the challenges of multicultural education, we find the issue of migrant integration, where there may be conflicts and academic underachievement. We have also mentioned instances whereby bureaucratisation rather than social inclusion has predominated in the treatment of diversity in schools. If multicultural integration and acceptance of otherness is to become a reality, steps are required in terms of leadership and general teacher training and in the conscious construction of inclusive cultures within schools.

One joint area which can contribute to this culture of inclusivity is that of the L2 and CLIL classes, which have become a mainstay in many Andalusian learning contexts. Here, language and non-language subjects theoretically work in coordination in order to generate integrated learning situations which all have the potential to focus on intercultural and plurilingual learning. The overarching goal for all language learners at compulsory stages of education is that of communicative competence, which in itself involves mastery of pluricultural and plurilingual components. Similarly, CLIL and the focus on the 4 C's of content, communication, cognition and culture, can also act as a springboard for the treatment of cultural diversity, openness towards otherness as well, of course, as a means of acceptance and celebration of one's own cultural identity.

Both areas of L2 and CLIL education fit within the wider curricular guidelines which promote plurilingual competence and

competence in cultural awareness and expression as two of the key competences to be developed across all subject areas regardless of the language of instruction. The legislative pieces, then, are theoretically in place to allow for the positive development of pluricultural and plurilingual attitudes and skills. What is required, however, is that these guidelines are fully assimilated in school cultures and classroom practices, and this requires both training and oversight.

One place to start in terms of professional preparation lies in the area of pre-service teacher training. Pre-service teachers, while lacking in professional experience, may be more readily open to non-traditional models of education and may be more fully prepared to assimilate innovative practices in terms of plurilingual and pluricultural components outlined in general and specific curricular guidelines. However, in this particular educational space, it is necessary to ensure that there are direct and meaningful contacts with schools; this ensures that trainee teachers can benefit from the knowledge of experienced teachers, while working professionals can also engage in dialogues regarding innovative teaching practices and current legislative requirements.

For professional teachers, in-service training in pluricultural and plurilingual dimensions should also be prioritised. Here, training should be first and foremost of a practical nature, whereby cultural and linguistic components are treated within meaningful task and project-based learning experiences which go beyond the classroom and take into account other members of the wider school community and beyond.

For such a situation to take place, however, informed and motivated leadership is required, both at administrative and school level. This would ideally involve further gathering of data with regards to the state of the treatment of multicultural issues and the development of pluricultural and plurilingual competences in schools and appropriate data-driven action plans in terms of in-service training, the development of positive and inclusive cultures, and the provision of recommendations for future teachers.

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