Whilst multilingualism has always been the norm in European societies, historically national languages were the ones privileged for study. Today, it is recognised that linguistic diversity can enrich the learning experiences of students at all educational levels by providing a powerful framework for understanding language and culture and for fostering social cohesion (Navracsics & Pfenninger, 2017, García & Wei 2014, Gogolin 2013, Fürstenau & Gomolla 2011). Moreover, it is recognised that using a language implies not only ‘doing things with words’ (Austin 1962), but also expresses different facets of power and hierarchy (‘language as a symbolic power’, Kramsch 2009:8; Bourdieu 1991), as well as aspects encoded in language ideologies (cf. Riehl 2014:74ff).

Focusing on languages historically excluded from the classroom but increasingly visible today, this project will compare the status of multilingualism in the partnership’s ‘collaborating cities’ to determine how multilingualism can be harnessed to improve language learning experiences and enhance intercultural acceptance—both core factors of individual and societal well-being—in the European classroom (Dooly & Vallejo 2020, Peyer & Barras & Luthi 2020).

The project aims are: 1) to compare students’ and teachers’ experiences and perceptions of multilingualism in the classrooms of four European cities—Birmingham, Leiden, Köln, Florence—; 2) to identify the mechanisms through which multilingualism can be harnessed as an educational tool in different European contexts, and how these can be synthesised to promote a pan-European initiative; 3) to develop a digital infrastructure of multilingual educational resources which empowers laypersons and enhances educators’ professional development. In the long term, the project will be a springboard for structured student and teacher exchanges across the envisioned inter-university campus.

With its comparative methodology, the project is designed to foster intensive transnational exchange and collaboration within the Consortium. Its fundamental purpose is to lay the foundations of a European mutual cooperation network and infrastructure that enables its various stakeholders—which include research and teaching staff, educators, university students and school pupils—to learn from, support and enhance each other’s research results, classroom practice, and wider expertise.
Bibliography


