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The project TEAM "Teacher Education About Multilingualism": for a lifelong education and training of teachers on plurilingual and pluricultural education

Abstract[1]

Teacher professional development is the primary tool for preparing teachers to adjust their beliefs, knowledge, and practices to meet the needs and learning scenarios of future students. One of the most appealing aspects of classrooms in the twenty-first century is the linguistic and cultural diversity among students; however, instructional practices in this field do not always reflect research findings. This paper describes the Erasmus+ project TEAM (Teacher Education about Multilingualism), whose primary outcome was the design and development of an online free course on the linguistic, neurocognitive, sociocultural, and educational aspects of multilingualism and plurilingualism. The course content and organization will be provided, as well as a reflection on the use of ICT in teacher education about plurilingualism.

Keyword

Teachers' professional development, MOOC, plurilingual and pluricultural education, multilingualism

1. *Introduction: plurilingual education and teachers' professional development in the ICT era*

The Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1, titled "The importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture" and adopted by the Council of Europe in 2022, underlines the importance of initial and further education of teachers in managing linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom. As the document states, the institutions and agencies responsible for teachers' education and professional development should "engage teachers in a detailed exploration of what plurilingual and intercultural approaches to education entail in terms of classroom practice" (p. 17).

In this paper, we will use the terms "plurilingualism" and "plurilingual pedagogies" to refer to all political and educational actions that seek to promote linguistic

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diversity and defend linguistic rights to ensure social justice (Piccardo 2025). We will not focus on the different epistemological roots of the concepts of plurilingualism, multilingualism and translanguaging: as an increasing number of scholars, we reject monocentric theoretical views (Payant and Galante 2022). Generally, we position ourselves in line with the complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman and Todeva 2022), according to which speakers, including learners and teachers, are interdependent agents operating in interrelated contexts, exposed to continuous variation: communication, as well as language learning/teaching, are iterative meaning-making processes based on the continuous adaptation of linguistic resources. Language is an open system, and language competence can always be developed and shaped by different life trajectories and interactions (Larsen-Freeman 2015). Similarly, bilingual competence is not conceived as fixed and adherent to normative discrete entities kept separate, but rather unbalanced, fluid, and permeable to contamination. An analogous perspective can be found in the concept of "plurilingual and pluricultural competence", which is further explored and analysed in the Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2020). In this document, the plurilingual and pluricultural competence is described as "the capacity to deal with 'otherness' to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc., in order to enable communication and collaboration" (Council of Europe 2020: 157).

We believe that teachers should not only strive to instill plurilingual and pluricultural competence in their students, but also serve as primary subjects in developing attitudes and skills for dealing with "otherness" by becoming aware of the complexity (but also potentiality) of their students' linguistic and cultural capital. García and Kleyn (2019) recommend that all teacher education programs develop competencies regarding bilingual students and their families, general knowledge of bilingualism and multilingualism, and instructional skills in plurilingual pedagogies. To achieve this goal, inclusive teaching should be informed by a "unified driving force" (Payant and Galante 2022: IX), despite the different epistemological orientations of theory and practices, by engaging in critical analysis regarding the empowerment of students and educators, as well as the legitimization of plurilingual repertoires. However, the academic debate appears to be disconnected from the daily realities of schools, and the dissemination of research findings is not always able to reach teachers and school principals to such an extent that allows for significant changes. For these reasons, teacher professional development, particularly through ICT (Information and Communications Technologies), can be a useful field for promoting tangible improvements.

In the last decade there has been a huge increase in the number of publications which investigated first and second language teacher education and professional development (see Crandall and Christison 2016 for a review, with a focus on TESOL). A large body of research analyzes the impact of professional development and teachers' cognition (Borg 2011), demonstrating that pre-service and in-service teacher education can enhance awareness and support teachers' in adjusting classroom practices

reflecting their beliefs. This appears to be particularly true especially when the training offered to teachers includes the possibility of engaging in practical activities (Buehl and Beck 2015) or, at least, of examining concrete examples of teaching strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the development of remote courses, which are viewed as a valuable alternative to traditional in-person professional development courses, particularly in terms of flexibility, access to resources that are not always available locally, and the ability to reach a larger number of participants (Lay et al. 2020). Recently, few research projects have started to design MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) for teacher professional development regarding alterity and interculturality, adopting also multiple languages in the materials and resources (Gamboa 2023).

In this paper, we will present the Erasmus+ Project "TEAM: Teacher Education about Multilingualism", which aims to provide pre-service and in-service teachers with contents and examples of practices related to bilingualism and plurilingualism, based on the most recent research[2]. The main project output is an OER (Open Educational Resources)/MOOC course built on the Moodle platform and freely available. In Section 2, we will provide a brief theoretical overview of OER and MOOCs, with the aim of introducing the TEAM project in Section 3, where we will offer an overview of the project, including the primary objectives and the various steps and actions implemented. In Section 4 we will describe the online course structure and syllabus, focusing on both the structural dimensions of the platform and on the different theoretical and practical educational resources. We will conclude by reflecting on the importance of developing connections between different perspectives in the linguistic field, particularly between cognitive and educational studies, as well as the role of academic dissemination in increasing teachers' awareness and skills in plurilingualism.

2. *Diffusing Knowledge in the Web 3.0 Era*

In an increasingly interconnected and technologically advanced era, the dissemination of knowledge plays a central role in the context of Web 3.0. This evolutionary phase of the World Wide Web has not only amplified the ability to access information, but it has also redefined how we share and build knowledge, opening doors to new paradigms and possibilities for lifelong learning, including for pre-service and in-service teachers. Within this frame, we aim to briefly discuss two concepts crucial for the subsequent description of the TEAM project: Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

OERs generally refer to educational materials that use a Creative Commons license or are in the public domain and free from copyright restrictions (UNESCO, 2002; Wiley, Bliss & McEwen, 2014). The primary goal of OERs is to promote ac-

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[2] We are aware that the word "multilingualism" will appear in the project name and throughout the online course. The introduction clarifies our position, despite the project's terminological choices, which were primarily due to the fact that the partners included neuro and psycholinguists, a field where the term "multilingualism" is more commonly used.

cessibility and equity in education by removing economic barriers, allowing learners to access high-quality educational resources. As stated by Smith & Casserly (2006: 10), at the core of the OER movement is the idea that "the world's knowledge is a public good and that technologies, in general, and the World Wide Web, in particular, provide an extraordinary opportunity for everyone to share, use, and reuse that knowledge". For a learning resource to be considered "open," it must not only be free but also allow the 4Rs (Wiley 2010): reuse, revise, remix, and redistribute.

MOOCs also align with the philosophy of open access to education and sharing educational resources but, unlike OERs, they are complete courses, structured in their entirety and offered (online) to a wide audience. The advent of MOOCs has revolutionized the landscape of higher education, emerging as one of the most innovative outcomes of using new technologies and the Internet for the democratization of education (Pomerol, Epelboin and Thoury, 2015).

As mentioned, MOOCs generally refer to online courses, often developed by prestigious academic institutions and experts from various disciplines, offering flexible and sustainable learning paths accessible (potentially) on a global scale. Traditionally, MOOCs have been distinguished into two main groups based on the chosen pedagogical approach and structure (Daniel 2012, Rodrigues 2013): cMOOCs (Connectivist Massive Open Online Courses), based on connectivist principles, more social and bottom-up in nature, and xMOOCs (eXtended Massive Open Online Courses), built on behaviorist principles with a more classical top-down approach.

However, this distinction, while useful for a general classification, is now inadequate to account for the vastness, diversification, and hybridization of online educational offerings. To effectively describe a MOOC today, it is necessary to consider multiple elements, including structure, pedagogical approach, theme, and target audience. Conole (2013) proposes a model consisting of twelve dimensions. In Section 4, as we describe the TEAM course, we will assess the breadth of each of these dimensions to more specifically position the educational resource in the vast landscape of online learning spaces.

3. *The TEAM project*

TEAM is the acronym that stands for "Teacher Education About Multilingualism", which is the title of an Erasmus + project conducted by a network of 9 European universities from September 2020 until August 2023.

The experts composing the working group mainly have a linguistic (theoretical, applied, educational) and/or a psychological background, and their heterogeneous profiles contribute to underline the interdisciplinary perspective of the project. Besides that, all TEAM members are partners of the network of Bilingualism Matters, which means that all of them attribute particular importance to research on multi/plurilingualism, especially in educational settings.

As mentioned in the TEAM website (https://team.amu.edu.pl/), the project has three main aims:

1. to strengthen the professional training of teachers and other educators in HEIs (Heigher Education Institutions) by preparing them to better deal with linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom;
2. to prepare pre-service and in-service teachers and other educators to better respond to the needs of students with migration backgrounds by making their teaching more socially relevant and inclusive;
3. to improve the quality of academic instruction by creating a new interdisciplinary course curriculum and teaching resources linking teacher training with relevant and up-to-date bilingualism research.

In order to reach the above-mentioned objectives and to create a link between research and everyday teaching in multilingual and multicultural environments, the project was articulated into four main Intellectual Outputs (IOs). The IO1 consisted in the construction of a syllabus for an online course dealing with multifaceted perspectives of bi-multilingualism addressed to pre-service and in-service teachers involved in the 9 countries of the project members. The syllabus was then subject to formal scientific validation by external experts. Based on the syllabus, the IO2 included the planning and creation of a wide range of audiovisual materials, which would be included in the open resource for pre-service and in-service teachers, including screencasts, interviews with experts, PPTs, quizzes etc. The following IO consisted in the construction of a "Bilingualism in education course", which included all the materials planned in IO2 according to a logically interconnected pathway which brings together linguistic, neurocognitive, social-cultural and educational components. Lastly, IO4 aims at setting up a TEAM open resource, freely accessible by teachers who would like to deepen their knowledge about bi-multilingualism through materials produced by experts. For this reason, a Moodle Platform (available at this link: https://fon.wa.amu.edu.pl/moodle/course/view.php?id=4&lang=en) was constructed as a repository for all the audiovisual materials created and brought together during IOs 2 and 3. More detailed information about the TEAM open resource will be provided in Section 4.

4. *The TEAM course*

Considering the overall objectives of the TEAM project, and as previously mentioned, an educational resource has been developed on the Moodle platform. It is an open and free resource, structured modularly in order to allow flexible use, catering to the needs of individual users and diverse target groups. Within the platform, users can interact with various multimedia materials, including screencasts covering theoretical concepts and case studies, interviews with experts, and testimonials

from multilingual individuals[3]. Essential bibliographies for each topic are provided, and interactive activities (Fig. 1 and 2) are available to assess understanding and monitor progress.

Figure 1 – *An example of self-assessment activity*
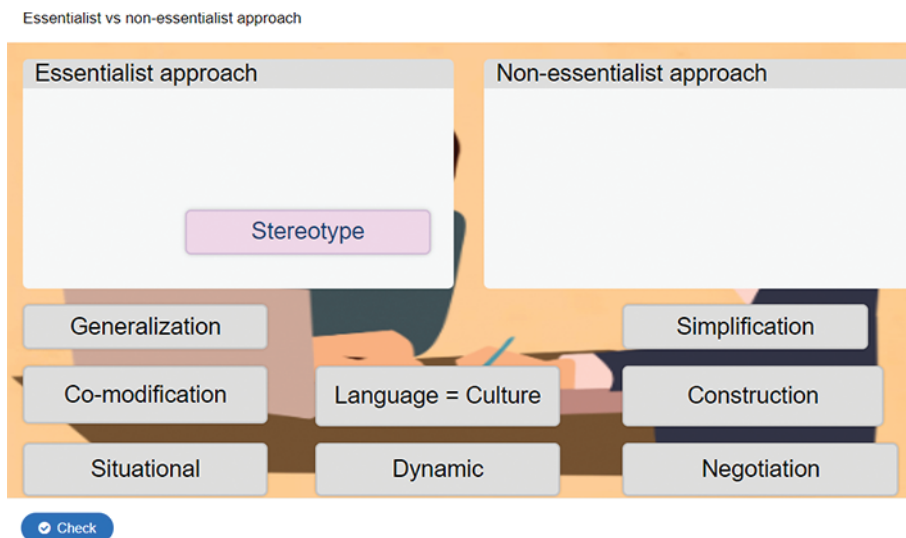
Figure 2 – *An example of quiz*
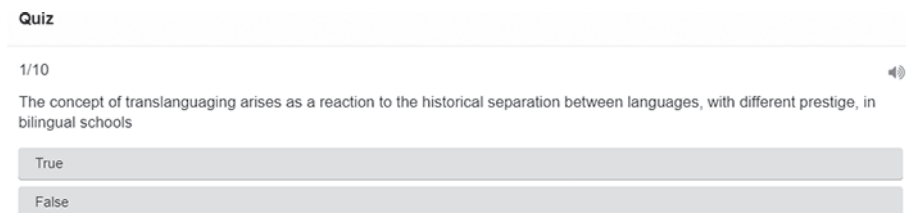
The course exhibits features that classify it both as an OER and a MOOC. As indicated in the course introduction, TEAM materials are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. All TEAM project materials can be freely used and shared, and modifications are allowed for all content (except video materials), as long as the original material is credited. Simultaneously, the resource is structured as a comprehensive course, accessible to anyone interested in exploring various aspects of multi/plurilingualism, making it akin to a MOOC. Table 1 contains the course analysis results and a detailed description based on the dimensions proposed by Conole (2013).

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[3] For an overview of all the video contents (screencasts, testimonials, interviews) please refer also to the YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@TEAMultilingual.

Table 1 – *Course analysis according to Conole (2013) dimensions*

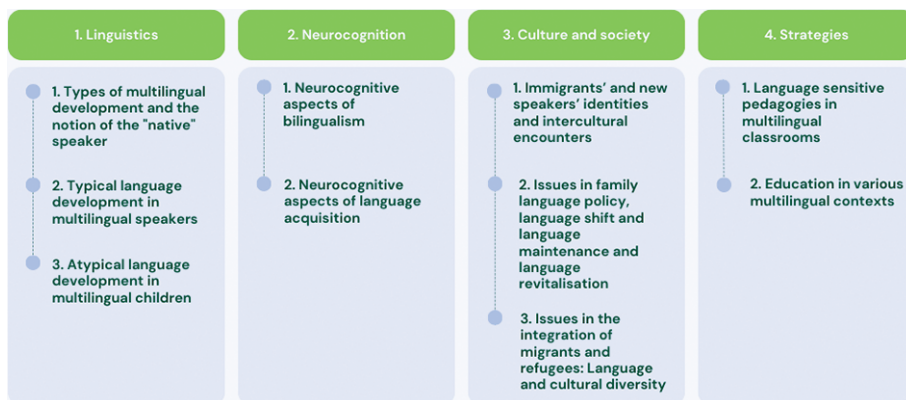| Dimension	Description
Massive	High – the course is designed for anyone with an interest in the topics covered, although it is notably inclined towards teachers and future educators. The multilingualism of the course ensures broad dissemination to linguistically diverse audiences.
Use of multimedia	High – the course relies on screencasts, accompanied by slides, video interviews, and video testimonials. Some videos are interactive. Additionally, activities and quizzes with immediate feedback, interactive maps, bibliographies, and webographies are available.
Degree of communication	Low – no discussion forums are provided.
Degree of collaboration	Low – no collaborative activities are planned, except for offline interactions.
Learning pathway (degree of structuring/personalization)	Medium – the course is structured in modules and sections freely accessible to users.
Quality assurance	High – the participating university institutions and educators are nationally and internationally renowned. Furthermore, the course was first content-validated by an external panel of experts and then qualitatively evaluated by the EU.
Amount of reflection	Medium – a final reflection on the completed course is planned, guided through a questionnaire. Additionally, offline activities, as well as video testimonials, serve as incentives for personal reflection.
Certification	Low – No certificates or ECTS credits are issued.
Formal learning	Medium – the course can be taken both within a formal learning path and informally by teachers, parents, or individuals interested in the topics covered.
Autonomy	High – the course can be completed autonomously; quizzes and activities allow users to continually monitor their progress.
Open	Low – the course is concluded, and with the Erasmus+ project completed, it is unlikely to be updated in the future.
Diversity	High – while the participation of in-service and pre-service teachers is particularly encouraged, the course is well-suited for anyone interested.

An essential characteristic of the TEAM course is its intrinsic multi/plurilingualism: the platform is accessible in all project partner languages, namely Arabic, Croatian, German, Hebrew, English, Greek, Italian, Polish, and Spanish. Not only are the

texts and instructions multilingual, but quizzes and accompanying activities have also been translated, and all videos are available with subtitles in various languages.

The resource consists of four modules, in addition to an introductory section, each dedicated to exploring different aspects related to the study of multi/plurilingualism. Each module, in turn, is subdivided into further sections that will be explored below (See Fig. 3).

Figure 3 – *List of TEAM course modules and contents.*

1. Linguistics	2. Neurocognition	3. Culture and society	4. Strategies
1. Types of multilingual development and the notion of the "native" speaker	1. Neurocognitive aspects of bilingualism	1. Immigrants' and new speakers' identities and intercultural encounters	1. Language sensitive pedagogies in multilingual classrooms
2. Typical language development in multilingual speakers	2. Neurocognitive aspects of language acquisition	2. Issues in family language policy, language shift and language maintenance and language revitalisation	2. Education in various multilingual contexts
3. Atypical language development in multilingual children		3. Issues in the integration of migrants and refugees: Language and cultural diversity	

Module 1 of the TEAM course, "Linguistic Approaches to Multilingualism", consists of three sections, the first of which introduces various types of multilingual development and discusses terminological issues, primarily related to the label of "native (monolingual) speaker". The section is designed not only to introduce key concepts for the study of multi/plurilingualism but also to debunk myths and stereotypes deeply rooted in common representations. In this sense, course participants will be able to identify issues related to the adoption of a monolingual "native" benchmark, in light, for examples, of research on L1 attrition (Chamorro et al. 2016). They will also learn to distinguish the various types of bi- and multilingualism of their students, also and especially by reconstructing their language history (De Bruin 2019), setting teaching actions with the learner truly at the center.

The second section focuses on typical language development in plurilingual/multilingual speakers, with a focus on the linguistic subsystems involved in the process. Drawing inspiration from diverse languages, TEAM experts describe the development of aspects of the sound system and lexicon in multilingual speakers. The idea that children regularly exposed to two languages from their birth develop distinct grammatical systems is discussed (De Houwer 2009). Finally, the concept of code-switching is examined, exploring its various forms and functions, along with the rules that govern it (Auer 2022), aiming to help participants accept it as a natural phenomenon in multilingual individuals.

The third and final section of the first module addresses language development in plurilingual/multilingual children with atypical language development. Participants in the TEAM course have the opportunity to learn how to identify

the properties and areas of difficulty in linguistic development associated with multilingual children with language development disorders, as well as to explain how these differ from multilingual children with autism spectrum disorder.

Module 2, titled "Neurocognitive Processes in Multilingual Individuals and Language Acquisition," is divided into two sections that explore neurocognitive processes.

The first section focuses on analyzing how and why the use of more than one language influences the functioning of the brain, both in terms of cognitive processing and knowledge and from a neuroanatomical perspective (Kroll and Bialystok 2013). Course participants will have the opportunity to explore various aspects of language learning, including approaches, contexts, memory systems, and individual differences. Additionally, an in-depth understanding of how different languages categorize external reality and how these differences impact brain processes will be provided.

The second section, in turn, offers insights into neurocognitive systems related to learning strategies and language acquisition. It explains the memory mechanisms connected to language learning and the diverse learning systems involved in the process of acquiring a second language. Moreover, it provides a detailed view of individual differences in cognitive processes related to language learning. Finally, it analyzes the impact of the learning context on attitudes and executive functions (Bialystok 2017).

Module 3, "Social and Cultural Aspects of Multilingualism", is divided into three sections: the first one outlines the importance of cultural diversity in society and in educational settings, reflecting on the identity of immigrants and new speakers, and it proposes theoretical and practical considerations about how to understand each other in intercultural encounters (Kramsch and Uryu 2012). This section aims to stimulate reflection on the differences between essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to address interculturality, with the goal of avoiding culture-based stereotypes and prejudices. Furthermore, the role of cultural mediators is explored, both in society at large and specifically in the school context (Scibetta 2022).

The second section focuses on family language policy, examined not only from a theoretical perspective with its definitions and components but also, and above all, through results and elements that can influence it (Curdt-Christiansen 2022). Emphasis is placed on factors, at an individual, social, and community level, that promote the preservation of the heritage language or, conversely, may lead to linguistic changes (Pauwels 2016).

The third and final section delves into intercultural psychology issues relevant to promoting the integration of migrants and refugees. Using the "Migration in Action" roadmap (https://migration.psychologia.uj.edu.pl/), teachers and future teachers are guided to reflect and identify the legal, linguistic, and cultural profile of various refugee groups and individuals, describing actions that can enhance social and educational integration (Fig. 4).

Figure 4 – *"Migration in Action" roadmap*
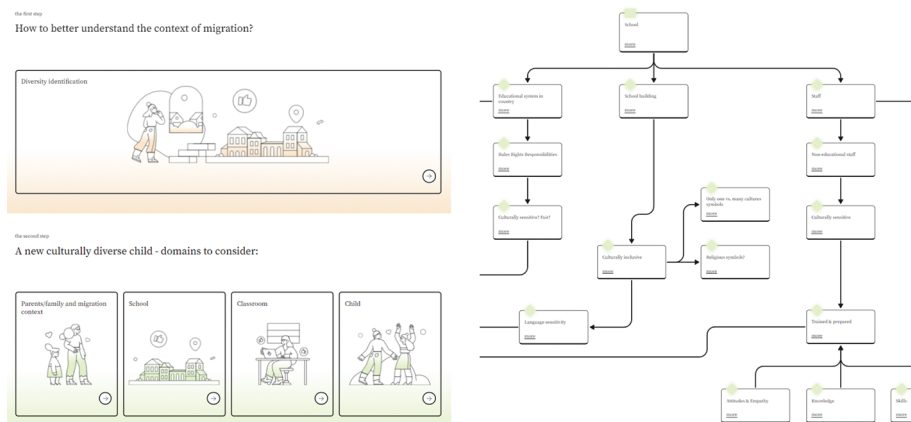
Finally, Module 4, "Strategies and Approaches to Multilingual Teaching," is the most operational and focused on the school context, providing an overview of plurilingual education. In the first section, perspectives sensitive to languages in multilingual classrooms are explored, along with ways to support academic language in multilingual students (Cummins 2008). In particular, the role of language in school and learning processes is described to raise awareness of the importance of conducting a linguistic analysis of languages in the classroom. Additionally, scaffolding techniques and their use to support oral and written skills in students are described.

The last section focuses on various teaching approaches in multilingual contexts, with a particular emphasis on pluralistic approaches to language education and translanguaging pedagogy, examining their impact in preserving linguistic and cultural diversity (Candelier et al. 2012, Carbonara and Scibetta 2020). The goal of this section is, on the one hand, to enable teachers and future teachers to understand why and how to elicit prior knowledge and skills of bi-multilingual students. On the other hand, it provides a series of teaching tools and techniques to use with refugee and immigrant children to develop plurilingual and pluricultural competencies.

5. *Concluding remarks*

In this contribution we aimed at emphasizing the role of ICT in the domain of language education, especially in a pandemic and post-pandemic era. Within this frame, it is important to reflect on the potentialities of open online resources, like OERs and MOOCs, for teachers' professional development purposes.

By introducing the IOs and the internal articulation of the open resources produced by the TEAM Erasmus + project, we aimed at underlining some crucial aspects. First, we remarked on the possibility of creating a link between the multifaceted scientific research on bi-multilingualism and everyday practice in educational

environments. Such a link is represented by a wide range of resources that are not only accessible in terms of free online availability but also in terms of transparency and adaptation of disciplinary discourse and contents in order to meet the concrete requirements of specific addresses (i.e. pre-service and in-service teachers dealing every day with language diversity). Secondly, taking into consideration that the TEAM resource is the result of a strict and fruitful debate on the role of multi/plurilingualism in different European educational settings, such materials also contribute to build bridges between different ways of understanding professional development for teachers dealing with multi/plurilingualism and interculturality across Europe. Furthermore, those bridges can be extended in order to create positive connections between different ways of welcoming bi/multilingual students in European educational settings, focusing on effective and concrete strategies in order to highlight the advantages of multi/plurilingualism.

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