



Sê plural como o universo.  
*Fernando Pessoa*

## INTRODUCTION

As consequence of the technological development and social and economical changes, an innovation in education and educational practices is necessary. In fact, the present information and knowledge society demands that each citizen receives a education of quality, as referred in the Lisbon Summit in March 2000: "(...) European education and training systems must adapt to the need to raise the level of employment and improve its quality".

At the same time, the globalization phenomenon, which has been felt at a large scale in society, brings social, political, economical and cultural consequences with it, and requires great effort from the whole community to adapt to the new demands.

We certainly need to face the challenge of teaching languages in the context of globalization, facing them as a fundamental tool, so that each community can express itself and make itself understood, not only in its mother tongue but also in other languages that work as francas.

The process of globalization brought the idea that we should use one and only language, and that it would satisfy the needs of communication of our society. We believe that this is a reductive posture that completely ignores the richness that plurilinguism offers in the teaching-learning process, contributing for the linguistic, discursive, communicative and social development, while allowing a dialogue between cultures.

It is in this context that the projects "PrimaLang" and "Plurilingual", integrated in the project Comenius InterNetwork, appear. The first relates to the simultaneous development of the plurilingual competence and the critical cultural conscience of 1st Cycle pupils. Following the first project, "Plurilingual" refers to the elaboration of a plurilingual learning manual, which has been a result of materials from language teachers, a methodologist and a Primary School teacher, and that have always been tested in the classroom.

In this article, we shall firstly analyze what the early language teaching in the European context is, and afterwards we shall present the previously mentioned projects in a more detailed way and analyze some of the materials made by students, as well as the conception philosophy of the manual itself.

## INTERNETWORK OF GOOD PRACTICES IN A PLURILINGUAL EUROPE

The goals of European Union have been centred in the promotion of intercultural communication between the Europeans. In fact, one should remember the recent effort with the European Year for the Intercultural Dialogue in 2008. Throughout Europe there were some events and projects, which contributed to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and cultural exchange, namely:

- a) Diversidad! Promoting dialogue and exchange through European Urban culture, which aimed at promoting and encouraging intercultural dialogue in the long term through the organisation of artistic events and panels of discussion, in the framework of urban culture and hip-hop.
- b) alter ego, which aimed at contributing to intercultural dialogue, cross-cultural understanding and promoting active European citizenship by young people through collaborative art projects that will make them reach beyond their normal social circles;
- c) cultures from around the block - creating a European network for intercultural community activities, which focuses in the important part dialogue between divided group can play in overcoming the problems that often persist in ethnically diverse cities;
- d) IYOUWE share the world, which aimed at promoting and encouraging intercultural dialogue through interactive work between story tellers, visual artists, musicians and primary school children, in order to share a common imaginary world.

These are just some examples of the European entrepreneurship regarding the promotion of dialogue among European peoples. However, these efforts are quite old. Since 1989 that European Union has been fostering dialogue by promoting language learning with the project "Language Learning for European Citizenship" (Council of Europe, 1989), in which the early in-

roduction of foreign languages was its main feature. Hungary, Romania, Austria, Poland, Sweden, Germany and Italy started offering early language programmes, in which children were able to study either English or French, or even one of the neighbouring languages of their countries.

In Portugal, until 2006, schools had been autonomous in the management of the whole process of teaching/learning of foreign languages, in choosing the language, contracting the teacher, making usage of the few materials in the Portuguese market, as well as other decisions. From 2006 onwards English became the foreign language schools should adopt and one was able to observe a boom of materials which aimed at sustaining what was decided by the Portuguese Ministry of Education. However, most of those materials are quite English centred, both linguistically and culturally, not focusing on an intercultural approach and above all on the building of a critical cultural awareness by our pupils.

In the scope of INTER Network project, a project composed by 23 institutions from 12 different countries which aimed at creating teacher training activities and materials, we have felt necessary to create teaching materials which would foster both a plurilingual and intercultural approaches since an early stage in the pupils lifelong learning. We believe that early languages learning can truly foster cultural awareness and in this way make intercultural success a smoother process. By being aware of culture, pupils can reflect upon cultural and language diversity. This can be achieved by initial and in-service teachers with the right tools, materials and activities. At the present time foreign language teaching is considered to be a need regarding the global mobility of people, particularly in Europe, where the issue of mobility has been discussed since the Maastricht Treaty until the society's emerging need for communication and knowledge.

The interest of the Council of Europe in the promotion of language learning is so strong that it created the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for the construction of a plurilingual and pluricultural Europe, in use since 1989, where the intercomprehension is the key to communication (Cruz & Medeiros, 2007).

2. Plurilingualism and intercultural awareness in early years of schooling  
The beginning of primary school brings many changes to a pupil's life, which are not only felt on a purely academic level. On the one hand, pupils

are faced with the systematization of their empirical knowledge of their mother tongue into grammatical rules and into written language. On the other hand, the most drastic change is the one that has not directly to do with the pupil's mother tongue, but with foreign cultures and languages (cf. Ribeiro, 2006).

Children have to adapt to a whole new world. For most of the pupils it is only by the time they start school that they experience their first contact with cultures and languages different from their own. This first contact is crucial for the development of the acceptance, or rejection, of the otherness.

By the time children start school, they have already developed an ethnocentric view, in terms of viewing their own language and culture as being unique. After being exposed to the otherness of different languages and cultures, they undergo a process in which all their previous knowledge and their view of their world has to be restructured.

The first feeling will be of rejection, because the otherness is seen as a threat to their – until then – complete and harmonious world. In some cases this fact is reinforced by their parents, who, most of the time, even unconsciously, foster the view of only one correct way of behaving in society, rejecting different forms of viewing the world.

In this sense, Curtain (1990:WEB) refers that the foreign languages learning promotes a development of a global attitude, serving the study of foreign language and culture as means for the development of the human intercultural competence (cf. Byram, 1997).

Pre-school and primary school play a crucial role in the development of a pluricultural and intercultural awareness. Besides the development of a linguistic and meta-linguistic awareness, the contact with children and adults, who don't share the same cultural and linguistic background, will broaden pupils' sociocultural awareness, which, as we have already referred, may not always be positive.

Already in 1985 the National Congress on Languages in Education Report (Britain) pointed out to the importance to “foster better relations between all ethnic groups by arousing pupils' awareness of the origins and characteristics of their own language and dialect and their place in the wider map of languages and dialects used in the world beyond” (James & Garrett,

1992:13). Thus, the role of the teacher is crucial in the development of either an ethnocentric sense or a pluricultural awareness. Pupils shall not only get in touch with different cultures and languages, but acknowledge that their language and world view is not unique, but only one among many other. This is not an easy task for the teacher, since it involves pupils' psychological and social features. One should always bear in mind that the feelings developed towards otherness in early school years will, in many cases, last throughout the whole life.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (2001:5) points out to the importance of exposing children to a great diversity of languages and cultures in early school years, by referring that: "It is no longer seen as simply to achieve 'mastery' of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the 'ideal native speaker' as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities have a place. This implies, of course, that the languages offered in educational institutions should be diversified and students given the opportunity to develop a plurilingual competence".

However, in Portugal, as in many other European countries, the vast majority of Primary Schools only teach English as a foreign language, neglecting, thus, minority languages and cultures with which the children contact on a daily basis, preventing, in many cases, the development of curiosity for the 'nearby' otherness. In this way, the development of the plurilingual competence may be constrained.

There is still a lot to do in many European Primary Schools as far as the diversity of foreign languages to be taught and their integration with the other curriculum areas is concerned. Unfortunately, teachers of different curriculum areas still work isolated, not trying to benefit from what is being taught and learned in other areas (cf. Ribeiro, 2006).

In this scope, teachers should focus upon the Plurilingual Competence (PC) as soon as pupils' schooling starts. This competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purpose of communication and to take part in an intercultural interaction, where a social agent has proficiency, on various degrees, in several languages and contact with several cultures (cf. Andrade & Araújo e Sá, 2002; Council of Europe, 1997). According to the Council of Europe, these competences must be fostered as

soon as possible in order to give European citizens the opportunity to participate in the European public discourse as earlier and as much as possible. According to Cruz & Medeiros (2006), "early language learning also allows the expansion of pupils' horizons by contacting with different languages and cultures, developing a conscience of the Other with an exposure towards the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe (...)" and promotes a learning based on the European diversity, preparing the ground for a more advanced plurilingual teaching as well as promoting confidence in the success of foreign language learning throughout the children's life.

Nowadays globalization and migration are understood as parts of a same reality. The school is an integration agent, promoting values such as citizenship, peace, human rights, equality, tolerance and education. Touraine (1996:40) argues that it is not enough to say that immigrants need to be integrated, but that it is urgent to accept them and recognize them too.

In contemporary societies where there is a very significant cultural diversity, it is vital that schools, educational communities and students establish practices and share information, cultural activities typical of each country to therefore promote skills in the mother tongue and in foreign languages. These exchanges can and should be done in several ways, respecting the interests and motivating the continuity of this learning. In practical learning environments, there are several proposals, whether practical or interactive, which extrapolate beyond the classroom through the Information and Communication Technologies.

In this context, early languages learning also allows the expansion of children's horizons by contacting with different languages and cultures. Therefore, they are able to develop a conscience of the Other and the understanding towards different people. This can be achieved by a permanent (and not intermittent) intercultural teaching approach which is possible through a foreign language integration methodology with other curriculum areas and with the right stimulating materials, such as coursebooks and multimedia objects.

In fact, Brewster (1998:48) also defends a foreign language integration methodology with other curriculum areas, by referring a set of advantages as result of this integration, namely: "the integration reinforces the conceptual development (example: colour, size, shape, ...)" since "this continuity gives

the child confidence and, consequently, makes the child more motivated”; “through the integration the transfer of competences between the different areas is possible, helping the pupils to develop strategies of “learning to learn”, that is, the usage of comparison, classification, problem resolution and hypothesis formulation in the acquisition of that foreign language gives them continuity and reinforces their usage in other curriculum areas; finally, this integration “develops and broadens contents in other curriculum areas, such as Maths (examples: hours, numbers, sets), Environmental Studies (example: plants, animals, use of maps), Musical Expression (example: rhythm, sound, singing, ...)”.

In this way, children would be able to accept quite easily early languages learning as something which is completely integrated within their basic learning needs, developing their plurilingual competence as early as possible, which should be sustained with the development of a critical cultural awareness. According to Andrade & Araújo e Sá (2001), it is expected that the plurilingual competence shall be relatively autonomous in relation to content and school materials, once it structures itself and evolves beyond school”, in other contexts other than school. However, we believe that this autonomous learning can only be achieved by a very good and structured plurilingual teaching approach. Let us now focus on two projects which represent this kind of belief.

## PRIMALANG & PLURILINGUAL: THE PROJECTS

With the creation of the European Union and its single market, i.e., the free movement of people and goods, there has been a need to rethink the role of foreign languages in today’s society. European society has been seen as a mixture of identities and languages, in which one’s own attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour interact with the Other’s. Thus, to learn foreign languages in a Europe where distances are shorter is a basic need. Both Primalang and Plurilingual projects aim to answer these current requirements, providing the tools necessary to acquire skills for communication in English (seen as the lingua franca in Europe) in different situations, but at the same time allow the learners to develop a plurilingual and intercultural communicative competence since an early age.

The first project, Primalang, refers to the creation of a plurilingual approach in the teaching-learning process, which worked in a provocative manner, by exposing children to different languages, such as: German, Spanish, Italian, French and Mandarin Chinese (apart from English). 3rd year pupils from the Portuguese Primary School System (aged from 8 to 9 years old) of the famous Oporto’s private school, Colégio do Sardo, were able to engage in plurilingual activities which occurred during 5 thursdays, from March to April in 2009. In each session, children were exposed to each language, learning some useful vocabulary, the countries which speak the language, curiosities, roleplaying some useful dialogues and making a portfolio which proves their own learning paths.

In the following pictures we can observe the type of activities which were developed, namely:



a) roleplaying;

Figure 1 – Children acting a Spanish dialogue with some hand puppets <sup>34</sup>



b) dancing and singing;

Figure 2 – Children dancing and singing to “Antes muerta que sencilla

<sup>34</sup> Some of these pictures are blurred to protect children’s identity.

c) playing games in the Interactive Whiteboard;

Figure 3 – Children playing an interactive game called “Say it two ways”



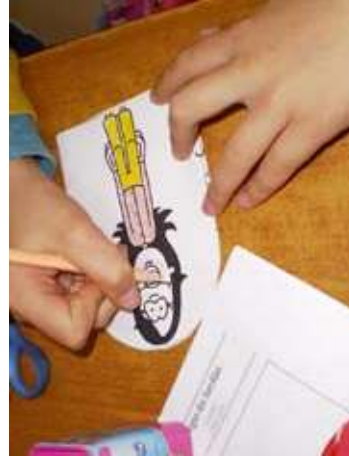
d) writing and reading;

Figure 4 – A pupil writing Chinese characters



e) handcrafting.

Figure 4bis – A pupil painting a hand puppet called “Mercedes”



With the second project, Plurilingual, three expert teachers gathered together and conceived a plurilingual coursebook, which includes 7 units. Through materials that allow contacting, analyzing and addressing different languages, students are able to create a taste for learning foreign languages and cultures, taking into account an interdisciplinary approach and cross-

content areas such as Portuguese, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Drama, Body Expression and Artistic Expression.

Let us now analyze one of the units of this coursebook. In this unit, entitled “New Worlds”, pupils are invited to discover the diversity of both languages and cultures which surround them. They start by focusing on some pictures and try to discern to which countries and cultures they belong to, such as in the example below:

1. Observa as imagens seguintes e assinala o que podes encontrar no teu país.



2. Agora refere em que países encontras os restantes símbolos ou objectos. Regista no teu caderno.

Figure 5 – Example of an exercise related to the association of images to countries

After this activity, they are invited to listen and sing-a-long to a song which speaks about different countries all over the world. Having this into consideration, they are requested to associate the names of the countries with their capitals, by analysing the song or doing some research on the Internet: They are also given the opportunity to play a game on the Internet, in which they keep on focusing on the capitals and countries. Afterwards the book introduces a word salad with greeting expressions in various languages:



Figure 7 – Word salad

By contacting with these, with the help of the teacher, pupils will try to group them with the corresponding name of the language, by filling in a table:

6.2. A que línguas pertencem as restantes palavras? Sabes o que significam as frases? Pede ajuda ao teu professor/ à tua professora!

Expressão	Significado	País	Língua
Bom dia	Bom dia	Espanha	Galego
Hallo!	Olá	Alemanha	Alemão
Ça va?			
Zdrave!			
Danke			
Allora			
Mange tak			
Grazie			
Gracias			
Wie geht's dir?			

Figure 8 – Table related to expressions in different languages



Figure 9 – Example of the type of material which stimulate the creation of a personal dossier

The book also offers the possibility to enhance pupils' learning skills at home by inviting them to compile everything which is related to different languages and with which they get the change to contact with. This section is called the dossier and its the most personal section of the coursebook. Each pupil will certainly have a very different approach to their dossier.

This unit ends with a song/ poem written in different languages. Pupils can make a choreography and dance to it. In the very end of the unit pupils are invited to write about what they have learned in the unit:

8. **Vamos cantar e dançar??** *Pede ajuda à tua professora de música para criares uma melodia para este Rap? E que tal também uma coreografia?*

*Mein Name ist Plural*

*Son cidadán do mundo global*

*Je veux vous connaître*

*Kom mee*

*Outras línguas, outras culturas*

*Other customs, other traditions*

*Molta gente, molte storie*

*No hay fronteras*



9. **Auto-avaliação – O que aprendi? Escreve um pequeno texto a dizer o que aprendeste no final desta unidade.**

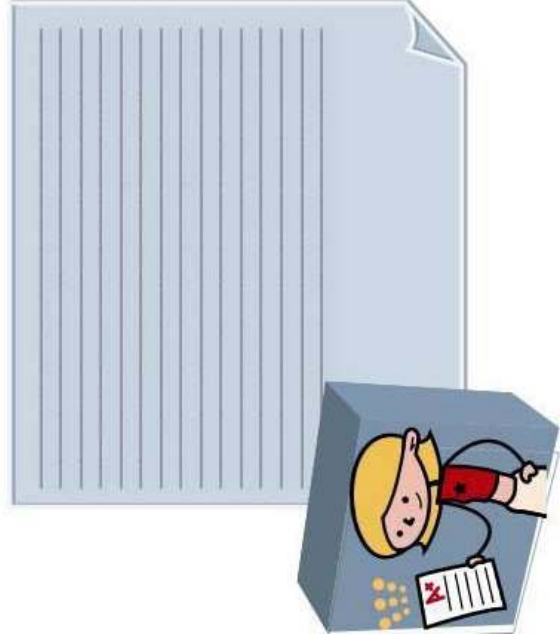


Figure 10 – Last page of the unit

We believe that the participation of young citizens in European public discourse must begin as soon as possible so that they recognise the linguistic and cultural richness of Europe since an early stage of their lives and, consequently, create conditions that encourage the early building of their linguistic and cultural repertoire.

A plurilingual and pluricultural teaching-learning process can make children build their own knowledge, promoting their integration into society as change agents and builders of an active citizenship.

The main aims of these two projects are:

- the creation of materials related to the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity;
- the fostering of a cultural-linguistic repertoire with pupils of a primary school;
- the promotion of a plurilingual and pluricultural teaching-learning process, from the teaching of English and their cultures;
- to make primary school teachers aware of the need for integrating plurilingual practices in their teaching-learning process.

In the following chapter we will analyze the production of the pupils who have participated in both projects.

## THE BUILDING OF AN EARLY AWARENESS OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES: THE FRAMEWORK OF PRIMALANG

Within the aims which we have just presented, our main aim was above all the fostering of a cultural-linguistic repertoire of our pupils. We consider we have achieved it by analysing all their production.

In this chapter we will present you some of the materials they have conceived in the scope of the Primalang project. We have already mentioned before that they had to build a sort of dossier, which could work as a proof of their learning path. This could take many forms. However, most pupils chose to build it as a box. In fact, they picked an old shoe box and decorated it quite personally, such as in the example below:





Figure 11 - Example of one of the dossier boxes



Figure 12 - Example of other two dossier boxes and their contents

This box is decorated with some symbols children easily associate with the country/countries which speak the language(s) they are learning. The boxes take many shapes and colours, but all of them include languages notebooks - a sort of leaflet explaining the basics of a language - and some personal items children have collected throughout the school year. Once we start analysing a dossier, we can learn how different pupils are and their interests. This can be felt when they start contacting with a language for the first time.

In the following example (Figure 14), pupils were invited to draw something which reminded them of German. Most of them draw the flag, some of them a football and others associated the language to Germany. This idea (that German is only spoken in Germany) is afterwards deconstructed by the teacher with the help of the computer and Internet.

The same happens with French as most of the pupils immediately associated it to France. They also focus on some monuments and stereotypes of the French culture, by drawing and writing some lines on each item: We consider that we were able to make children think about culture(s) by associating it with the language(s) they came to contact with. In the following example, we can see that the pupil who wrote this no longer associates France only to French.

Now he/ she knows that there are plenty of other countries which speak French as well. Moreover, this pupil also focuses on a symbolic analysis of the colours of the French flag. The same happens with the Spanish language. During the session children found particularly interesting the fact



Figure 13 - Drawing and expression in German



Figure 14 - Cover of the German notebook



Figure 15 - Example of another piece of work related to French

that the language was really similar to Portuguese. The kept on doing some comparisons. In the dossier of another pupil we found some interesting representations he/ she has of the language, together with a table with some others in both Spanish and Portuguese which do not sound the same either grammatically or semantically (figure 17).

At the same time this pupil mentions that "There are some words in Spanish which are quite funny" and "Spanish is very cool and very funny too". This sort of phrases can be found in other portfolios as well. In



Figure 16 – Example of another piece of work related to curiosities about French  
 Figure 17 – Curiosities about Spanish

fact, in comparison to other languages which we have taught, Spanish was the one they liked the most. Perhaps this has to do with the proximity of the language. Another language they liked a lot was Mandarin Chinese but for opposite reasons: it is an exotic language! In fact, most of the pupils found quite amusing to learn writing and speaking Chinese apart from the difficulties. Children were able to learn the basics of the language, namely: greetings, numbers, useful expressions. In the following picture (Figure 18), you can see some of the items they have learned.

In this essay, the pupil describes what a Wok is and what it is for. It also explains how to make a recipe of rice with some vegetables. In this other essay (Figure 20), he continues exploring the Chinese culture and its monuments, writing about the famous Chinese Wall and its history. However, their learning continued at home because as we are able to see in some of the portfolios pupils researched some more things about the Chinese culture, writing some essays on some other topics, such as in figure 20. These portray how committed they were in learning some things of a culture other than theirs. All these examples show us how different things children can learn when we engage them in the world of languages, cultures and peoples, being aware of the thing the world can offer them.

Number	Chinese Number	Chinese Pronunciation
1	一	yao = 1
2	二	ah = 2
3	三	shin = 3
4	四	sh = 4
5	五	woo = 5

Figure 18 – The numbers in Mandarin Chinese



Figure 19 – Essay on Wok

**CONCLUSION**  
 In this article we have presented the approach we believe it is the correct way towards a richer learning process. Nowadays we have been living times of changes. In this ever-changing world it is necessary to educate children towards and active long life learning, in which they are able to rebuild the competences they have achieved as the times change by. Our role as teachers is to offer them experiences of the world that surround them, especially the ones which offer them the chance to rethink



Figure 20 – Essay on the Chinese Great Wall

society, its values and their own place within it. This type of learning must always work in an interdisciplinary way and with place for dialogue and sharing of ideas. This leads pupils to be tolerant and respectful of other ways of thinking. By exposing them to diversity of languages we exposed them to different cultures at the same time, making them reflect upon other cultural symbols and ways of thinking. This is what Primalang and Plurilingual projects are about, i.e., making children think and be aware of the Other and all good things a pluricultural world can offer them.

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## SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH INNOVATIVE TEACHING APPROACHES

### *A Case Study in a Multicultural School in Greece*

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## INTRODUCTION: INNOVATIVE TEACHING APPROACHES

Innovative approaches in Education have been variously associated with learning technologies, pedagogical approaches, organizational processes, grant opportunities (Alexander, 2006), responses to globalization, and to the agendas of government (Roberts, 2004).

Despite its fuzziness and questions about the meaning of the “new” inherent in the term (Conole, de Laat, Dillon & Darby, 2008; Alexander, 2006), it seems that the connecting theme of innovation in Education and in teaching approaches is a significant change, and its potential to transform practice.

Innovations occur within a context of change, or to use Callon’s (1986) term, a “controversy”. Callon (1986) and Latour (1987) identify four “moments” of translation in analysing a controversy, not necessarily consecutive. These can be outlined as follows:

1. Problematisation or “how to become indispensable” (Callon, 1986, p. 203), in which key stakeholders or assemblages are defined. Key actors will attempt to establish themselves as an “obligatory passage point” around a problem (p. 206). For examples, teachers are an obligatory passage point around education.

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