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TRAM NEWSLETTER



Transitions and Multilingualism

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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

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1. Editorial

In October 2009 eight partners from Germany, Romania, Latvia, Sweden and the Netherlands representing parent associations, universities, research institutes and inspecting authorities have established the project TRAM - Transitions and multilingualism that will run until September 2012.

As the project title implies TRAM focuses on two major topics: transitions of children from pre-school to school and the multilingual background of these children. The core of the project is the development of a teacher training curriculum for Continuous Professional Development (CPD). More details about the project have been presented in the first newsletter and are available on the project website www.tram-project.eu.

The TRAM Consortium is pleased to announce the second issue of the TRAM newsletter. The special focus of this second issue is on the first results of the project: the reports about the situation of multilingual children in transition to school in the five partner countries.

The partnership of TRAM is interdisciplinary including experts in developmental psychology, pedagogy and linguists. Irregularly this TRAM Newsletter will publish interviews with these experts to highlight their views on the project's topics. We are happy to start this series with our project partner Dr. Emmanuelle LePichon-Vorstman who is a lecturer at the French and Dutch departments of Utrecht University.

The other articles present the ongoing work, experiences with dissemination activities (German National Transfer Workshop) and the cooperation with the project WiFF - Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte (Continuing professional development of early childhood education teachers).

The next issue of the TRAM Newsletter will be published in summer 2011 focusing on the curriculum for teachers and the international piloting of the curriculum in May in Romania. If you would like to subscribe to the TRAM Newsletter, please register by sending an email to the following email address: info@tram-project.eu. Please forward any comments or suggestions regarding the TRAM Newsletter to the same email address.

For further information please visit our website www.tram-project.eu.



Dr. Renate Heinisch

2. The situation of multilingual children in transition to school in the five partner countries

The TRAM partners have compiled five country reports informing about the past and present situation of linguistic minorities (especially about the children) in Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden. The reports have been written following a standard template: (1) they describe measures operated by the educational institutions referring to multilingual children, (2) name the actual state of discussion and present research studies from each country, (3) highlight basic and further training of educators and teachers in the field of interculturality, multilingualism, didactics of language teaching and managing educational transitions, (4) mention administrative programs of multilingualism, interculturality and transition, (5) present useful practical examples and (6) show how European requirements are implemented.

The most important results show that there is still except for Germany little information about how educational institutions cooperate in order to handle

transitions. Here co-constructive models are needed.

- The involvement of parents - especially those of linguistic minorities – is everywhere similar.
- The Netherlands are the only country that highlight the use of cooperation with other services (Health; Social Services) in order to help minority families.
- It is not possible for the partner countries to exchange education systems, national models or programs.
- A targeted revision of the reports of each country will improve the awareness of the tasks and the need of TRAM.
- Basic and further training of competent „transition managers“ for children of linguistic minorities is an urgent duty.
- Exchange of expert knowledge as well as collecting more practical experience/ evidence might be helpful.
- Initiative and confidence are still important factors for TRAM.

3. German National Transfer Workshop

For dissemination purposes and to initiate a national network of stakeholders in the field of early childhood education, transitions and multilingualism each partner of TRAM organises so called National Transfer Workshops (NTW). The main target groups of the workshops to assure long term impact of the project are initial teacher training insti

tutions and further training institutions. In addition decision-makers, representatives from ministries, parent and teacher associations as well as kindergarten and primary schools are stakeholders participating at National Transfer Workshops. The idea behind the NTW is to promote the CPD course to be developed within the project so that ear-



ly childhood education teachers are prepared to work successfully with multilingual children in class.

The German NTW took place on 25-6-2010 in Ludwigsburg at the University of Education. The programme reflected a deliberate mixture of presentations of project results and research activities in the field presented by research associate Dr. Monika Pfaller-Rott from the Catholic University Eichstätt. Her research interest is targeted at migrant parent involvement in transitions from kindergarten to primary school.

Pfaller-Rott presented the descriptive study that summarises the way through which migrant parents are involved in their children's education and how migrant parents wish to be involved in school. In short, the study showed that migrant parents wish to be in dialogue with the educators and primary school teachers and do appreciate a cultural sensitive atmosphere. Wilfried Griebel from State Institute for Early Childhood Education presented the country reports from the five project countries. Following these two inputs the 25 participants were discussing „multilingualism and transitions“ and „institutional aspects: selection in school“ in two working groups. The final discussion panel was summarised with the conclusion that „in transition from elementary to primary education cultural ethnic patterns of children, parents and teachers are highly effective“.

4. Steering group meeting in Liepāja (Latvia)



The third meeting of the steering group of TRAM project took place in Liepāja - a city in western Latvia on the Baltic sea. It is the third largest city in Latvia and an important ice-free port. As of 1 January 2010 Liepāja had a population of about 83000.

The host of the meeting has been the University of Liepāja and the group was warmly welcomed by the dean of the faculty of education and social work Dr. Ilze Mikelsone.

The meeting started with study visits to Liepājas pirmsskolas izglītības iestāde „Rūķītis” (<http://www.lpii-rukitis.lv>). This kindergarten educates 120 children between 2 – 7 years. The kids have Latvian and Russian background. The instruction language is Latvian but they do speak from time to time Russian as well. Some kids do not know Latvian when they start kindergarten. There are Latvian, Russian and Lithuanian speak

ing parents. The teachers do speak Russian with the parents if needed. Kids are coming from the area where the kindergarten is located (middle class area). New parents receive written information about the kindergarten and are introduced to the kindergarten during a individual talk. There are group sessions with parents and the nurse as well as the pre-school teachers on selected topics. The parents can participate in the parents board. Professional background: all pre-school teachers have higher education. 12 h per year are reserved for CPD of the teachers. CPD can be realised in in-house trainings as well as Comenius courses on European level. The teachers have to pay for the CPD. The kindergarten works with the step-by-step programme.



After having seen this great kindergarten the group moved to Karosta (War Port) in the north of Liepāja. It served as a base for the Soviet Baltic Fleet. When the Russian army left Latvia in 1994 after Latvian independence, Karosta became largely uninhabited and most structures fell to ruin. In late 1990s, the area was troubled by high unemployment, street crime and drug problems. Some remaining residents are considered neither Latvian nor Russian and hold "alien passports". Here in Karosta we had the chance to visit the school "Pamatskola, nr. 3". The school is loca-



ted in the former Soviet army area and provides an inclusion programme for mentally retarded children and children with learning disabilities. Among the 530 pupils 17 have special needs. Language of tuition is Russian but sports, music and arts are supposed to be delivered in Latvian. All teachers have high proficiency level in Russian and Latvian. There is a pre-school class within the school. Parents are welcome to come to classes and help a lot in practical affairs of the school. There is a programme for the parents to learn how to support their children in learning activities.



After these very interesting and inspiring study visits the group was working hard for two days. The discussions went about the results of the country reports, the presentation and methodology of the interviewing exercise in the different countries and the presentation of relevant practice in the field in each country. The core of the discussions has been the collaborative development of a structure

for the curriculum and the assignment of writing modules. The curriculum shall be divided into a theoretical part and modules. The theoretical part will include the explanation of terms.

There will be 7 modules:

Module 1 Diversity

Module 2 The role of educational institutions

Module 3 Transition

Module 4 Parental work, parents participation, educational partnerships with plurilingual parents

Module 5 Pedagogic professionalism of dealing with plurilingual children and parents

Module 6 Multilingualism and communication strategies

Module 7 Handling plurilingualism

The materials of interviews and relevant practice shall be included into the modules.

The fine planning for the next work package has been important to clarify all tasks.

Later the partners presented their comprehensive dissemination activities: TRAM has been presented by Anja Seifert and Christa Kieferle during the conference „Grundlegende Bildung ohne Brüche. Eine Tagung der DGfE, Sektion Schulpädagogik, Kommission Grundschulforschung und Pädagogik der Primarstufe.“ in Weingarten; 28.9. - 1.10.2010. A publication is planned for 2011. Moreover it had been in the discussion by Inge Johansson during Special interest group at the University of Birmingham during the ECERA annual conference, 5th - 8th September 2010. Emmanuelle LePichon presented TRAM within her talk „Speaker, Hearer and External orientations: development of the strategic competence of young plurilingual children“ at PLIDAM, Paris (17.06.10) and OTS gave a poster presentation: European Project Tram - Transition and Multilingualism at University Hamburg: Multilingual Individuals and Multilingual Societies (06.10.10). Wilfried Griebel had a talk: Transition and Multilingualism - a multilateral COMENIUS curriculum project at the University of Birmingham, 5th - 8th September 2010.

5. Associated project: WiFF - Continuing professional development of early childhood education teachers

The contact between TRAM project and WiFF - Weiterbildungsinitiative Frühpädagogische Fachkräfte (Continuing professional development of early childhood education teachers) has been initiated at the German National Transfer

Workshop in June 2010. A follow-up meeting took place in Munich in October 2010 aiming at the identification of synergy effects.

The European Social Fund as well as the

Federal Ministry of Education and the Robert Bosch Foundation support the initiative for continuing professional development of early childhood education teachers. The four main objectives of the initiatives are (1) to make transparent the diverse types of trainings in early childhood education in Germany, (2) to set quality standards in initial and further training in early childhood education (based on the European Qualification Framework), (3) to support accreditation processes and (4) to foster cooperation among stakeholders in early childhood education.

During the meeting the TRAM and WiFF partners identified a field of cooperation: the Continuous Professional Development course TRAM could serve as training within the WiFF project. The course must follow the catalogue of parameters set by the WiFF project. The continuous training shall take place a couple of days per year followed by practical exercises.



6. Expert Interview

The project TRAM - Transitions and multilingualism“ investigates how multilingual children can be supported in sensitive transition periods e. g. from pre-school to school. The partnership of TRAM is interdisciplinary including experts in developmental psychology, pedagogy and linguists.

Irregularly this TRAM project newsletter will publish interviews with these experts to highlight their views on the project's topics.

Our first interview partner was Dr. Emmanuelle LePichon-Vorstman who is a lecturer at the French and Dutch departments of Utrecht University. As a lecturer she teaches courses in French as a foreign language, sociolinguistics and didactics. She has defended her thesis on the effect of learning a new language on children's communicative competence. Her main research interests are plurilingualism and communicative competence in children.

1. TRAM focuses on multilingual children and intends to support them in transition phases so that their skills in several languages are maintained and even reinforced. What is your interest as linguist in this?

Children who are schooled in a monolingual system using a language different from their mother tongue often perform less well academically. People often believe that children learn a language naturally just by being sufficiently emerged in a second language. I believe that this is only partly true. From a linguistic point of view when compared to adults, children will learn a second language more perfectly than adults in the end: most impressive is their capacity to acquire a native accent rapidly. But some linguists have compared the acquisition of two languages simultaneously to the building of two houses. Of course, in the end one has two houses ,but the construction may

take more time than when you only build one house. People even used to think that the acquisition of the two languages would cognitively disadvantage bilingual children when compared to monolinguals. This turned out to be not true. On the contrary, bilingualism has proven to be even advantageous albeit under certain conditions. Two of those conditions are particularly of our concern in the TRAM project. The first one is that research studies, mostly conducted in North America, have shown that if children have the opportunity to develop both of their languages to the same level, they will also have the best chance to succeed cognitively. The second condition is that children can only benefit from their multilingualism if they feel that both their languages are being accepted and supported.

2. In the Communication “Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment” the Commission states that “...children with different mother tongues — whether from the EU or a third country — ... can also motivate their classmates to learn different languages and open up to other cultures”. What is your opinion about the idea that multilingual children could interact as motivators for learning languages among monolingual children? What are the prerequisites to successfully implement this strategy for encouraging modern foreign languages learning?

In my research I explore the different aspects of communication that may be affected by the learning of a new language at an age that the child may be conscious about his/her learning. I found that learning a new language at

school and at an age that the child may be conscious about his/her learning significantly enhances the child’s understanding when dealing with communication problems. Children who have the experience of learning a new language develop more willingness and strategies to communicate. The conscious language learning experience appeared to generate an increased confidence and a more positive attitude toward the communicative situation. Learning a new language may thus play an essential role in facilitating communication within the classroom between all different interlocutors. If a child feels praised and accepted he/ she will then be able to be proud of his/ her home language, culture. Then, children will be able to open up to each other and to learn from each other.

Regarding the implementation of language courses at this young age, it seems to me essential to reflect with the children on the situation of communication itself and to insist on all communicative strategies that help to solve a communication problem (mime, imitation, ask for assistance...). This learning may allow the children to become more conscious of the existence of the communicative problem associated with this situation and this in turn will help them to solve these problems more adequately and with more confidence.

3. From your point of view, what is the role of multilingual parents in early childhood transitions? Why do these parents need support in educating their children?

Because of the recent globalization, more and more families are put in situations in which they need to interact without having sufficient knowledge of

the target language/ culture. I have been myself in this situation two times, one time in The Netherlands when my oldest child entered school and another time when I moved to the United States. I remember one time my daughter was quitting the day-care in The Netherlands to enter pre-school. There was a celebration in which my child was praised for what had been shared with the group in their time together and she received presents from the other children. It is a very nice transition event that is organized everywhere in the Netherlands (for a birthday, a change of classroom or a departure). When I picked up my daughter at the end of this last day, the teacher came to me and asked me why I did not bring any present to her friends. I did not know what she was talking about. She added that the children were very disappointed because they had expected to receive one. I had been living in the Netherlands already for a couple of years, I spoke the language reasonably well but nobody had ever told me about this tradition. The result of it was that I felt disappointed and unsure about myself.

The reason why I give this example is that it illustrated how hard it can be for immigrant parents to help their children to adjust in a schooling system of which they themselves do not know the traditions, nor even understand the language. So I would say that it is not only important to provide help and support for the children, but also to find ways to support the parents as well. This goal may be achieved through different ways that we try to develop through the TRAM project.

4. Do you think TRAM takes sufficiently into account linguistic rese-

arch? If not, which fields should be considered more deliberately in the upcoming project year?

TRAM is a very important project because, in this project not only we try to help parents, children and teachers in the transition phases but we also investigate the different approaches from the different countries/ systems and try to learn from these observations.

There is still a lot to do in terms of understanding how languages develop optimally, particularly when a migrant child is involved in a monolingual school system. As a linguist I am very concerned with the tests that are given to those children. What if a child does not understand what is being asked in the test because he doesn't understand certain words in the instruction? In addition, it may be difficult for a child to manifest his or her incomprehension particularly in a school context. In such a situation, the child will have to interrupt the course of an ongoing communication, otherwise he/she will quickly lose track of what is being taught. Ultimately, such events may become a pattern that is likely to be highly prejudicial to the cognitive development of the child. Strategic competence is thus necessary in order to prevent this negative outcome. Therefore we need to understand how incomprehension manifests itself in young plurilingual children and to help the children to express it. Strategic competence is a key concern of my research.