FAQs about plurilingual Education: Key issues and some informed answers

- What can be done in schools so that students benefit from linguistic diversity?

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- How can we conceptualise writing in the 21st century?

- How can we promote students' autonomy in the use of reading comprehension strategies?

- How can we teach reading to a class with many different levels of literacy?

- I learnt to read in my native tongue through phonics. Now they say it is not a good approach to teach reading to non-native speakers. Can I use phonics with my newly arrived students?

- How can teacher help newly arrived students develop their phonological and phonemic awareness in a new language?

What can be done in schools so that students benefit from linguistic diversity?

It is obvious that schools cannot teach all languages to all students, especially in primary schools, but there are pedagogical approaches that help take into account the different languages present in classrooms. These models are known as the Awakening to Languages (Candelier, 2003a) or Education and Openness to Languages at the School (Perregaux, 1998; Perregaux et al., 2003) and can be considered as a complementary learning model. These proposals allow teachers to integrate heritage languages and cultures as pedagogical resources in the classes and legitimize them in the eyes of students and teachers. The key to the integration of languages and heritage cultures are the parents. Studies show that it is through parental involvement that teachers and their students can discover the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in their school community and can transform this diversity into knowledge. Parental involvement in the school learning goals and practices also contribute to the development of a more global view of languages and cultures among teachers. Through experience that involve plurilingual parents, teachers come to recognize the value of plurilingualism, regardless of the language status, and to improve their understanding of the schooling of plurilingual children in their classrooms. The objective of the approach known as 'Awakening to Languages' is not only aimed at bilingual children, but is open to everyone, monolingual and bilingual, to build multilingualism, and create a common culture throughout the class. The co-intervention of parents and teachers raises an awareness in children of the richness of linguistic and cultural plurality that is not superficial or rooted in a stereotyped vision. Studies regarding parent-teacher cooperation indicate that these experiences help teachers develop a transdisciplinary and inclusive approach in class, which allows them to use the different languages as a bridge between disciplines. This inclusive approach to education is directed to all the children in the class, without anyone being excluded from the group. All teachers must allow the classroom to move from a monolingual space to a multilingual space, using multilingual signs to decorate the walls, including dual language books in the library, etc. Also, all languages and cultures must be considered collectively and as equal resources (having one language should not be considered better than having a different, sometimes lesser valued language). Bilingualism that includes languages other than the language of the school must also be valued so that students can feel comfortable in the classroom. Scientific research shows that it is easier for a child to become bilingual or multilingual when all their languages are valued and the connection between languages is encouraged. It is important that parents continue to use their family languages with their children and that teachers use family languages, whenever possible, to help children establish connections between the language or the languages of their environment. It is easier for children to devote themselves to the languages taught at school when their own languages are recognized. Enhancing the different languages and cultural contexts of children increases the self-confidence and the self-esteem necessary for educational and professional success. Parents' participation in school activities also establishes a relationship of mutual trust between schools and families and helps children become more involved in their education. We should give future citizens the opportunity to build positive representations of the multiple identities of their peers and their families so that they can be proud of who they are and feel accepted and

understood by those who around them. This is a must if we want to live together in peace. Because everyone should be able to build their own identity based on their family life and in their relationships within and outside school, it is vital that the school confront this challenge of facilitating this. Today's school is not just a place where knowledge is acquired, it is also the place where an individual's capabilities and knowledge are brought together. It is also the place where teachers and students learn live together not only by sharing a single language but also by embracing the diversity that we live in in order to build common values.

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Perregaux, C. (1998). Avec les approches d'éveil au langage, l'interculturel est au centre de l'apprentissage scolaire. Bulletin Suisse de Linguistique Appliquée, 67, p. 101-110.

Perregaux, C.; De Goumoëns, C.; Jeannot, D. et De Pietro, J.F. (2003). Education et Ouverture aux langues à l'école: EOLE, vol 1& 2. Neuchâtel: Conférence Intercantonale de l'Instruction Publique de la Suisse Romande et du Tessin.

How can we recognize and integrate children's family languages into our teaching practices?

In most cases, "what newcomers know how to do when they begin their schooling in the host country, they have also learned in their mother tongue. This should be the starting point for all learning, but in multilingual environments, this is often ignored and forgotten when the language of instruction is different from the language a child knows" (see the interview with Maria Montes on our project website). Yet, although research shows that new knowledge is acquired by drawing on already existing resources by applying strategies such as creating connections and making inferences, school's language and literacy teaching remains often times a "one language only" and "one language at a time" enterprise. From this language separation perspective, practices that draw on students' home languages are avoided, forbidden or seen as problematic. Some teachers justify their rejection of allowing students to use their heritage languages by arguing that this practice prevents their learning of the local and curricular languages. Even when teachers recognize the value of students' family languages in the learning of literacy in Catalan, they usually argue that they do not know how to deal with the linguistic diversity of the classroom, as they do not know most of their students' home languages. In schools with high ratios of immigration, where one single classroom can have dozens of newcomers from very diverse origins, the idea that teachers should have a vast knowledge of students' heritage languages might seem like an impossible quest. Fortunately, having a high command of all students' home languages is not a compulsory condition for their inclusion in school literacy practices, and there are other strategies to bring in and integrate this knowledge. First of all, there are plenty of open-access materials, publications and 'good practice' resources that teachers can use to move towards inclusive and meaningful teaching that promotes spaces and activities of

interrelation between family and local languages (see GREIP teaching [resources](#)). The Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures' [webpage](#) is another good example of such repository. In this regard, it is also important to know that we can count on the help and implication of families. This implication can occur, for example, by inviting parents to read or tell stories in their family language in class. Dual language (bilingual) children's books can be a very useful resource for developing this and other activities, as they provide the possibility to read the same story in both a home language and the school vehicular language and are available in many different languages. Using these and other resources, teachers can focus on creating activities that imply that boys and girls can include family languages. Teachers can also encourage that the books and other dual language materials (such as reading diaries) 'take a journey' between school and home, in order to create continuity of literacy practices and promote reading habits in all the families.

Why is it important to accept and enhance plurilingual uses when teaching a new language?

Despite still-pervasive language ideologies that promote a monolingual vision of individuals and societies under the premise 'one nation = one language', European states are historically multilingual as more than one language has been spoken in their territories throughout their history. Furthermore, globalization and migration movements have added language and cultural diversity to a territory, which explain, for instance, why Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, French, Italian, Russian or Turkish are some of the languages spoken in many European countries –and classrooms- today (see article '[Key concepts in describing plurilingualism](#): A brief glossary" by Dolors Masats). Within such multilingual environments, being exposed to and familiar with more than one language is a common, everyday situation for most EU citizens, who are bilingual or plurilingual speakers as they can take part in communicative situations in more than one language, although their competences in different languages may be uneven. Two premises should be foregrounded here: while bi/plurilingualism is the norm and not the exception, oftentimes language contact practices and hybrid productions in more than one language are labelled as problematic, and opposed to an ideal figure of a monolingual 'native speaker'. Also, those language varieties and registers that do not match with this 'ideal native speaker' (e.g. Latin American varieties of Spanish or Asian varieties of English) are rendered less legitimate, and their speakers signalled as deficient. All in all, the consequence is that the use of languages or varieties different from the mainstream, official or standard ones is discouraged in many settings. This monolingual perspective of plurilingual contexts can also be found in many schools and classroom practices, which operate as communities of practice with their own rules regarding which languages are legitimate and accepted for classroom interactions and activities, at the playground, to address families, and so on. These rules might not be overt, or be very explicit, as when the English teacher insists that the students only use English, and evaluates negatively plurilingual uses. These monolingual rules clash against robust, evidence-based research that shows that learning a new language occurs

by activating one's linguistic repertoire –that is, all the language and communicative resources one already possesses- as an aid when communicating in the target language. Thus, communication in a new language is always a process which occurs in a plurilingual mode, which means that to sustain the flow of communication, emergent bilingual or plurilingual speakers make use of plurilingual procedures such as code-switching and code mixing. These strategies, which imply using more than one language to create meaning, are actually scaffolding procedures that indicate that learners are making positive steps towards the development of a new language. Thus, if the ability to rely on mechanisms such as code-switching and code-mixing is inherent to the development of the communicative competence of bi-/plurilingual speakers, classroom communication in a plurilingual mode should be accepted and encouraged in the classrooms as a practice that guarantees the development of the new language.

What is the best way to organize and prepare for the arrival of a foreign student into our classroom?

There is no secret formula that ensures that the welcome of new students is a success but here are some guidelines that may be helpful:

1. Prepare a welcoming meal for the students. Arriving in a new country, especially if the road has been made in conditions that have endangered the lives of children and their families, is a very tough experience. The first day at the school determines, in some way, how it will be the vision that the newly arrived pupils will form with respect to the school environment and the relationships with the teaching staff and the rest of the students. Preparing a small welcome is a way to make these boys and girls aware that they are well received and that the school can be a welcoming environment for them.

2. Place them at a desk or table near the teacher's desk. Establishing positive affective relationships with teachers and peers is essential to ensure the success of any child's learning. If a climate of trust and empathy is not encouraged in the classroom, it is difficult to create the best situations to learn. In the case of newcomer students, this aspect is even more important. Placing the boy or girl who has just arrived near the teacher's table is a first step to show that the adult is paying attention to what the child needs and can offer immediate support.

3. Get local students to show the newly arrived students around the school so they can learn all of the different areas of the building and outdoor spaces. It is very important that when the new students get to school they feel well welcome and know all the spaces of their new school. Nobody better than their classmates can show the spaces and outdoor school facilities. It is a good opportunity to give responsibilities to local students and to get them establish social relations with the newcomers.

4. Students must be given learning materials. Students who have just arrived must have, like the rest of the students, their own materials so that they can follow the lessons and

their teacher and do the necessary activities. Having the material itself will help them gain security and be able to review at home what has been done at school.

5. Accompany students with class routines so they integrate these as quickly as possible. School routines can be very different in other countries or cultural contexts. The concept of teacher's authority or discipline are clear examples. As a teacher do not give anything for granted. It is necessary to explain (and repeat) to newcomers what is expected of them and how they must react to the instructions of the teacher. The observation of other classmates will also help them acquire those necessary habits.

6. Provide ample support materials that will help them learn the language of communication of the school as quickly as possible. Daily communication at school must be our priority. Learning the language that supports communication and learning at school is very important. In Catalonia, teachers have many support materials available to help them cater for the needs of students of immigrant origin. Among others, at: http://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/projectes/alumnat-origen-estranger/alumnatnou/materials/catala/

7. Provide them with games that can help them learn to integrate socially while learning the school language. Socialization and communication are the most important axes for the adaptation of the newcomer to our school. Nothing better than playing games to help them relate to the rest of their classmates and learn the language of the school. In this link you will find games that will motivate them and help them learn Catalan: http://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/projectes/alumnat-origen-estranger/alumnatnou/materials/catala/jocs-lamines/

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What support should schools provide students with another language and culture: What should we add to 'their backpack'?

The curricular contents for students arriving to the schools with other languages and cultures should be the same as other students, however, language and social support should also be included and aspects that favor the acquisition of communicative abilities in the school language should be prioritized. From a linguistic point of view, the contents that should be prioritized in the classroom when the teacher is preparing the classes that includes these new students are the following:

• The linguistic resources to be targeted are those that allow students to interact in the most common situations in the school.
• The vocabulary and the discursive structures to be taught are those related to the development of students' cognitive abilities in all curriculum subjects: describe, argue, synthesize, etc.
• Teaching should focus on helping learners develop skills related to oral and written comprehension and production. In the initial cycle, work on the development of the spoken language should be especially prioritized.

• Students should gain knowledge on the key vocabulary related to the different school subjects.
• Teachers should anticipate and minimize the difficulties related to the students' lack of prior knowledge regarding different cultural references and/or new knowledge to be acquired.

 Students of foreign origin, in addition to developing knowledge of the subjects of the school, need to progress in their command of the school language, with the final objective that the students can use this language in all the subjects, in all learning activities and in all settings, both inside and outside the school, autonomously and without additional support. As the Department of Education of the Catalan Government, Generalitat de Catalunya, argues (http://xtec.gencat.cat/ca/projectes/alumnat-origen-estranger/suport-linguistic-social/sobre-sls/presentacio/), the educational success of these students depends on the capacity of the school to make them feel included and at home. This implies that while the full participation of these students in the life of the center and the community must be supported and encouraged, at the same time, it is necessary to respect and value differences, to move towards an intercultural approach in which all the students feel recognized (see article 'Dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom' by Xavier Pascual). It should be emphasized that an inclusive school involves a set of attitudes and actions that affect and imply all students equally, regardless of their origin. From an intercultural perspective, the aspects that should be taken into account when it comes to class planning are as follows:

• Acknowledge the previous linguistic and intercultural knowledge of newly arrived students.
• Allow space for students to show their language and culture in the classroom and include activities in which all the students can participate.
• Value the linguistic and cultural diversity of all the students present in the classroom.

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What are some strategies for supporting language learning through play?

As we have seen in the MOOC 'Teaching in multilingual classrooms', when children play, they are learning how to communicate with others while learning how language works. Language and development build on each other.

> When children play, they constantly use language. They determine the conditions of make-believe. They discuss role and objects and directions. They correct each other. They learn about situations and ideas not yet tried. (Mooney, 2000, p.83).

Research within the last 25 years shows a positive connection between literacy learning and play (Hall, 1991). In a study carried out by Saracho and Spodek (2006), it was found that when given specific objects, children will engage in reading and writing activities

during play (p.716). Studies also demonstrate that play can enrich a child's emotional, social and cognitive development.

According to Wilford (2000), there are five goals that educators can set in order to support the process of literacy development of young children though play. These are:

• Encourage children to create and assign meaning to objects. Labelling games, sign-making, poster-creation are some ideas for doing this. This helps stimulate their understanding of how symbols can represent meaning.
• Provide them ample opportunities for engaging with others. This means allowing time and space during class time set up around potential learning moments.
• Give them objects or games that require solving a difficulty or dilemma as this can help them develop problem-solving skills while engaging in intensive communication with others. It also promotes their autonomy and independence.
• Offer them fun literacy objects (e.g. comics, online texts) that are slightly more difficult than their current level of reading. This can be motivating and help build their self-confidence.
• "Promote joyful engagement" (Hall, 1991:7). Children should be allowed options and to have some choice in the type of play that interests them. There are many different types of play that can promote language learning: symbolic play (using objects to represent something else); socio-dramatic play; creative play (use of imagination); social play (games); role play and fantasy or recapitulative play (exploring historical figures, for instance).

Teachers should be willing to take advantage of all kinds of play!

References: Hall, N. (1991). Play and the emergence of literacy. In J. Christie (Ed.), Play and early literacy development (pp.3-25). Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
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Saracho, O. N. & Spodek, B. (2006). Young children's literacy-related play. Early Child Development and Care, 176(7), 707-721. Wilford, S. (2000). From play to literacy: Implications for the classroom. New York: Child Development Institute.

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Are there any ideas or tips for quick support of vocabulary acquisition?

Developing a gradual competence in the language used at school for communication and for accessing knowledge is fundamental for the integration of students on immigrant origin in the schools. Learning a new language is a long and complicated process and requires careful and coordinated planning between the teacher, school administration and the learner's family. However, it is also good to have at your fingertips some quick ideas to make sure the day-to day vocabulary acquisition is going smoothly.

Here are a few ideas:

Choose only a few key words to focus on per text or other resource rather than worrying about all of the potentially unfamiliar words. Teachers can scan the materials they are planning to use for the next lesson in order to identify the key words needed to comprehend the text. This list should be kept to a minimum as studies show that students learn vocabulary words better if they are introduced to only five or ten words per week rather than overwhelming them with long lists of words to be memorized. The best way to choose these words is to make sure that they are essential for understanding the text and that the students cannot infer their meaning from the context. In other words, prepare and introduce key words that will support the students' understanding and which if not understood, would hinder their comprehension of the text and thereby de-motivating them.

Teachers can prepare students for the text by simply going over the words the class before reading the text, or use more creative visual aids on the walls of the classroom or bringing actual items to class that help illustrate these words. Using these items to get the students to predict what they are going to read or hear will also inspire and motivate them to know more about the content of the lesson.

Highlight the key words in use. Teachers should also find ways to call their students' attention to these key words during the time they are reading or listening to the text. This helps them understand how the word can be used in context. There are several fun ways to do this.

For instance, each student can be assigned a word and when it is used they must carry out a set activity (e.g. hold up their hand, shout out the word, hold up an illustration, etc.).

Get the students to make their own memory resources or get students to create their own vocabulary lists of their chosen words and share their 'favourite' word once a week.

These vocabulary lists can be turned into bi/plurilingual flashcards, illustrated dictionaries or similar items for the whole class.

Asking the newly arrived students to help create materials for others is great way to get them to feel immediately participative and involved. Their materials can also be used for quick memory games. Another quick way to adapt materials is to provide part of the answer in handouts. For instance, if the class has been asked to read a text and provide definitions of set words, the newly arrived student can fill blanks for the definition rather than having to complete the whole empty blank where the definition should be.

The most important feature for teaching vocabulary is that it is seen as a fun thing to do, not a chore!

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How can teachers help newly arrived students without lowering the requirements and level for all the class?

Supporting language acquisition is not just about helping the newly arrived student integrate and feel comfortable and included. While this is a very important part of the process, and some might even argue the essential part of becoming part of the school community, teachers cannot ignore their responsibility of ensuring that all their students have the opportunity to acquire the necessary academic level that the curriculum outlines. However, as Axford, et al. (2009), point out, although it is important that students feel challenged with what they are asked to learn, if it is level is too high, the learners will become frustrated and de-motivated. Without proper scaffolding, few learners can overcome highly challenging learning goals. It is important to garner the innate drive for learning that all individuals hold. Inevitably the content of the class must be adjusted to the level of the students. Ideas for adapting resources and creating materials are abundant (see GREIP teaching materials).

However, as said before, the teacher must also ensure that the students gain access to the academic language needed in the school and beyond. 'Study buddies' or free after-school tutors can be assigned to help students with homework. This may be especially key if the families do not speak enough of the school language to help with homework.

Ample exposure to expected academic 'voice' should be provided, along with explicit, metalinguistic reflection of key aspects of the academic genre, according to the level of the students. For instance, in early childhood education, expected academic genre may be the use of simple reported speech, such as in scientific reporting. Integrating and paying explicit attention to the language aspects in the science class helps support the acquisition of this particular feature of academic writing. In this case, the language teacher and science teacher can work together to create 'laboratory reports' for any science experiment students are doing in the science class (measuring volume, seeing what substances float or sink, etc.).

Differentiated templates for reporting can be used (the higher the level of the student, the more blank paper to fill; lower level students may have part of the text provided for them and only have to fill in some gaps of key terms). It is up to the teacher to find creative ways to ensure that all students acquire not only the content knowledge established in the curriculum but also the communicative competence to demonstrate and dialogue with others about their knowledge.

Reference:
Axford, B., Harders, P., & Wise, F. (2009). Scaffolding Literacy: an integrated and sequential approach to teaching reading, spelling and writing. Victoria (Australia): ACER press.

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What is the best reception formula to support newcomers in the learning of the school vehicular language and in accessing the curriculum and social activities?

The incorporation of students from foreign backgrounds to a new school in the host country has become a common phenomenon in most countries, due to the extended nature of human mobility and migratory movements in recent years. The general objective of the linguistic and social support of these students should be to overcome the language barriers of the academic language of the subjects, while helping them to progress in the domain of the daily use of the vehicular language, in order to guarantee their rapid social inclusion. However, there is not one single and consensual model or method for the reception of these newcomers.

Some schools and countries offer individual support in the ordinary classroom, for example by allocating special professionals to accompany the child, by adapting the tasks and materials to his or her language level and needs, or by looking for other students' support (e.g. a peer with similar language background). Other schools have special separate lessons for language immersion where students are allocated since their entrance to the school and until it is considered that they have achieved the necessary proficiency in the school vehicular language and are prepared to integrate into the ordinary classrooms. Finally, other schools opt for an intermediate solution, which allows students to attend most classes with their class group, but takes them out during certain hours (usually the hours devoted to foreign languages) to attend a special reception and language immersion classroom. The objective of this measure is augmenting and intensifying their contact and exposition with the school vehicular language by providing more hours and a special curriculum in this separate classes, however, this happens at the expense of their attendance to foreign language classrooms which are usually the only spaces where foreign students can display their language competence (as many times they have been previously schooled in one of these foreign languages and have a better level than their classmates).

While the complete separation of newcomers from local students is becoming less frequent, since the benefits of promoting interaction with other school students are considered to offset the instruction of the language in separate classes; creating a space where newcomers receive special attention with emphasis on immersion in the vehicular language can make a bridge in a positive way towards their full integration into the mainstream classroom. Oftentimes, these reception spaces offer newcomers a more appropriate rhythm of adaptation and learning, and a space where they can also display their language repertoires and share their cultural backgrounds in ways that the regular classroom does not allow.

In any case, it is important that these special receptions classrooms are always a temporary stage and that schools provide clear criteria, resources and materials that facilitate the full integration of students into the ordinary class as soon as possible. Schools should also take into consideration allowing newcomers to participate in those subjects and activities where they can display their knowledge and abilities with their regular classmates.

How should teachers deal with students' errors while learning a new language?

For many decades, an extended belief in the field of second language education was that learners' errors should be corrected immediately as they might become fossilised as a permanent feature of their speech. This was especially so in audiolingual methods, based on repetition and practice (drilling) of grammatical structures for memorization, and on a focus on explicit and immediate error correction. However, language acquisition theories and methodologies have evolved considerably in recent years.

As the aim of language learning moves away from more normative approaches and towards a communicative perspective, error correction has been widely examined. Nowadays, errors are believed to be a natural part of the learning process, and seen as indicators of the development of learners' communicative competence. Therefore, the first thing teachers need to keep in mind when teaching a new language is that making errors is not only a common, but also important part of the process of learning a language and, therefore, mistakes should be dealt with naturally.

Depending on the age and maturity of the learners, one of the first strategies a teacher can use regarding learner mistakes is to discuss them with students, so that they understand that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process and that there is no need to correct them at all times.

Teachers should also consider and discuss the ways and the frequency in which errors can be corrected. A useful strategy is to 'collect' the group class most common errors (both written or spoken) to be then collectively corrected (and discussed if the students have enough maturity for metalinguistic comprehension).

Students might also self-correct their own or others' video-recorded oral productions (this might be better done at home or in pairs to ensure learners do not feel exposed to criticism).

Teachers might also allow students to decide if or when they want to be corrected, as they might feel more of less confident according to the activity, and negotiate classroom signals to indicate when a student wishes to be corrected in each specific activity. These spaces for student decision making and tolerance to errors should be articulated by teachers with the message that they cannot forget that the overall desired objectives of language learning is to develop, in due time, the ability to produce error-free texts and utterances.

Another significant factor teachers need to consider when approaching errors is whether the learning task that the students are working on focuses on accuracy (correct use of language) or fluency (developing communicative abilities), as teachers' emphasis on error correction and the opportunities for doing so will vary accordingly.

Also, it is recommended that teachers become familiar with potential difficulties related to the L1 of their students, as the target language may have some speech sounds (phonemes) that do not exist in other languages (see Dooly & Vallejo's article on 'teaching pronunciation across languages'). Finally, teachers should critically reflect on what constitutes an error. As the concept of the native speaker as the reference for language learning becomes increasingly questioned and replaced by more realistic models of resourceful communicators, teachers should bear in mind the diversity of varieties of a language, and that acknowledging these differences (rather than ignoring them or labelling them as errors) might enrich students' learning of the target language and also develop their intercultural awareness.

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How can teachers best support young plurilingual learners' writing development?
There is a very important correlation between writing and language development. Most students first develop their listening skills (through extensive, comprehensible input), followed by their speaking skills, then their reading skills (they begin to make a correspondence between the sounds and symbols of the new language; and make sense of new words) and finally their writing skills. This last phase comes once they have sufficient language to express their own ideas in writing.

Teachers need to remember that writing requires a lot more processing of language because learners are having to produce a message through symbolic representation. There are many strategies for helping learners with writing but it is recommended that teachers try to use what is called 'differentiated' activities. For instance, learners who are very new to the language might be asked to simply copy a short text while the next level learners have the same text but with some blanks which they have to complete and the highest level learners in the class write the entire (or almost the whole) text on their own.

Inevitably, the approach to be taken for teaching writing must be adapted to the learners, based on age, current literacy level and which writing system they are familiar with. There may be significant differences across script systems. For example, text in Arabic runs across the page starting right to left, whereas in English it starts left to right. Korean and Arabic, to cite another example, do not have upper and lower-case letters and punctuation is often different across systems. In addition, learners also need to learn the mental coding that goes along with each script. For instance, Chinese languages rely on visual representations of concepts whereas English writing uses phonological representations.

Teachers should find as much information as they can regarding the writing systems of their students to help anticipate potential misunderstandings of the learners regarding the different systems. The 'old-fashioned' dictation practice is one of the best ways to work on writing, as learners engage in a complex mental process which entails gathering acoustic information while listening, and then, while writing in matching the phonological features to words in our long-term memory (Thornbury, 2001). Research shows that this 'phonological loop' consists of approximately seven units of information

– each which 'decay' after around two seconds (this is what makes it difficult to take notes from a speech that is very fast and long, for instance). A dictation, however, is best broken into short, spaced-out segments (which should match the contextual knowledge of the listener).

Inevitably, dictation can seem boring so the teacher should try to be creative. An adapted version of dictation, commonly called dictogloss (Rinvolucri & Davis, 1988), can be a useful strategy for supporting the development of writing in the target language. This exercise consists of the teacher reading a short text (it should be about a topic that the learners are familiar with). The first time the text is read, the teacher should speak at a normal speed while the learners take notes. The teacher reads the text again, this time with some of the key words written on the board. Potential problem words for new language learners can be added to the list as well. The second time, learners add to and refine their notes. After this, the learners share their notes in pairs or groups. Following this, the teacher reads the text again and then the learners work together once more (in pairs or groups) to try to reproduce the original text. In addition to helping students learn the writing system of the new language, this exercise also enhances listening skills, helps develop learners' capacity to make informed guesses based on phonological, lexical, syntactic, textual and contextual information and improves the academic skill of note-taking.

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Rinvolucri, Mario, & Davis, Paul (1988). Dictation: New methods new possibilities. Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres.
Thornbury, Scott (2001). Uncovering Grammar. London: Macmillan Heinemann.

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Are there any features related to learning to write that is common across all languages?

All children begin to learn to write by first scribbling. As a first step, scribbling is very important because it provides a basis for children to develop the motor skills they will eventually need for actual writing. For instance, it is through scribbling, that children acquire eye-hand coordination.

Allowing them ample time to experiment and play with coloured pencils is important. Learners should be encouraged to talk about, explain and interpret what their scribbling 'means'. This phase is essential as it eventually leads to the learners understanding that physically drawn figures can represent language in written form. The scribbling will gradually begin to take on forms that seem to 'mock' handwriting (including circles, lines, etc.) which then leads to production of some identifiable letters.

These letters will be used randomly (with other scribbling, for instance) and then the child will begin adding letters, but again, without order and perhaps strung all together in a long 'sentence' without gaps between 'words'. More advanced stages of 'pre-

conventional' writing include invented handwriting (made up words that represent units) and approximate phonetic writing.

Sometimes parents and teachers wonder if it is too taxing for children to learn to write in more than one language at a time. Studies show that this should not be a concern. It's a common phenomenon for many people. Children are learning to speak, read and write in more than one language all around the world as you read this! However, as Wang (2011) has pointed out, some researchers feel that a child learning two languages that have similar orthographic systems (e.g. the use of Latin-based script as in English or French) may learn writing more quickly than children who are learning very different orthographic systems at once (e.g. Catalan and Chinese).

The sharing of linguistic features may make the transfer of knowledge about one system to another go more quickly, however, this does not mean that child cannot learn two different systems simultaneously. It is a merely a question of time and correct scaffolding of the learning process. As Wang (2011) states, "it takes a great amount of time for a child to develop reading and writing skills in one language. Needless to say, those children who grow up with more than one language require even more time to develop the skills in multiple languages" (p.2).

These are the key points teachers should bear in mind to offer students sufficient support for learning to write in multiple languages: 1) Learners need ample opportunities to observe texts in the languages they are learning so that they can imitate them through the previously mentioned phases (from scribbling onward). 2) Learners should have authentic, socially-oriented reasons for writing. 3) Learners should not be punished if they mix orthographic systems, as part of their writing development phase is learning to distinguish between the languages of input.

References:
Wang, Xiao-lei (2011). Learning to read and write in the multilingual family.

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How can we conceptualise writing in the 21st century?

In a few simple words, writing could be defined as the skill of 'putting words or ideas into paper', that is, as a communicative tool that relies on symbols (the alphabet, in our cultures) to represent language as text. However, this simple definition actually entails a whole set of abilities and challenges, and involves much more than just a writer and a pen.

To begin with, writing entails the competent display of a wide and diverse array of basic skills like the use of vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and semantics. It also entails the ability to produce and communicate well-structured ideas by choosing words and deciding their order, to then create sentences and paragraphs, and to connect them all coherently into a text.

The complex nature of writing also relates to specific historical and cultural contexts, implying different abilities and resources accordingly. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that writing has evolved significantly in the recent decades and years along with the key role that digital tools like computers, mobile phones and other communicative devices have gained in our lives.

If writing was traditionally seen as a manual activity of putting symbols in a paper, and handwriting was consequently considered a critical skill, nowadays writing involves developing handwriting abilities plus many other skills, including digital ones such as the use of text processors and other software, mobile applications and many other tools. The current context of many societies, marked by human mobility and social and linguistic diversity, has also had a significant impact on writing.

Thus, writing complexity has also a sociolinguistic component that needs to be acknowledged and developed. Related to this, a major task of writing nowadays involves the display of the sociolinguistic competence, that is, the ability to produce texts according to the specific settings and participants, adapting our productions to the genres, registers and conventions required or expected in each situation and by specific participants.

This ability to navigate and adapt our writing to different contexts becomes crucial as communicative situations become more varied and complex by the emergence of new formats and networks, with diverse, at times simultaneous addressees, and by the transnational and delocalized nature of many exchanges.

Digital communications also foreground the ability to integrate diverse linguistic and semiotic resources and to assemble multimodal texts which might include, for example, words, symbols (emoticons…), pictures or other images, locations, audio and audio-visual elements, all in one single message or exchange. In such complex contexts, students need support to walk the path of writing a text, from planning, drafting, writing, editing and rewriting, to assembling diverse semiotic resources and meeting the requirements and expectations of the setting and participants. This is where teacher's guidance and a proper cycle of scaffolding writing becomes highly relevant.

How can we promote students' autonomy in the use of reading comprehension strategies?

There are several strategies that teachers can use to help newly arrived students understand the content and the structure of a text before, during and after reading. Below are some guidelines that teachers can follow when their students confront a new text.

Before reading, teachers should:

- help students capture the general theme of the text.
- make use of the titles to get students elicit the topic(s) covered in the text.
- encourage learners to rely on words in bold and images as a support to comprehend the text.
- activate students' previous knowledge by bringing in images on the subject or headlines and by talking about the topic.
- decide whether it is necessary to carry out a general reading or detailed reading and orient the readers regarding these different approaches to the text.
- help students recognize the genre of the text.
- discuss the structure of the text with the student.
- have the students guess the purpose of the text and discuss their expectations about what they will read.
- discuss the pragmatic function of the text and what they will learn.
- define the purpose of the reading task.

During the reading, teachers should:
- decide if everyone will read together, in tandems, or if they will read aloud and students will read quietly on their own.
- ask the learners to underline or write keywords and words that they do not understand while reading.
- pose questions so that the newly arrived students can orient themselves towards the purpose of reading and, where appropriate, find the sub-sections of each paragraph.
- have the learners take a break at significant points and read together by asking questions about the section they have just read. • clarify the points that are not clear.

After reading, teachers could set learners the task to:
- summarize the most important snippets of text. • summarize individual sections of a text.
- give an oral review of the text.
- illustrate what they have read on a poster.
- try to summarize the text in a sentence.
- give an opinion or rate what they have read.
- search for information on other texts related to the content of the reading.
- provide a critical reflection of what they have read.
- adapt the text by illustrating it.
- re-write a real text (news clipping, history) as a fictional story.
- recreate the text through role-play, drama, games or drawing.

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How can we teach reading to a class with many different levels of literacy?

One of the most common strategies for dealing with different levels of competences of students in the same classroom is through differentiated learning. This requires

important planning by the teacher but helps ensure that each child is provided the scaffolding he or she needs. The first step a teacher should take is to get an idea of where each student is at in terms of levels of proficiency, or what some call 'student readiness' for learning.

There are formal assessment tools but a common and effective informal strategy is the well-known KWL chart. The teacher asks the students to identify what they already Know, what they Want to know and after the intervention, what they have Learnt.

It is also important to find out individual interests in order to adapt as much as possible, materials or activities to cover many interests. The same can be said regarding preferences in learning. Another tactic is to use tiered assignments. This means that all of the students will do the same activities (content, outcomes) but the complexity of the process will differ. Lower proficiency learners will be provided with more closed, narrowly focused instructions and requirements whereas higher proficiency students will have more complex, abstract and open-ended instructions to complete the activities.

For example, after reading the same (or similar texts wherein one is the original text, the other adapted), lower tiered instructions might ask the learner to draw a mind-map of the main ideas of the text with some key words already provided. Higher tiered instructions would ask the learners to re-tell the text from another perspective than the one presented in the text (e.g. a minor character in a short story).

Similar to tiered instruction, students can be provided with a 'menu' of follow-up activities, leading from an assigned reading (again, this may vary between original or adapted texts). The learners choose one or more activities to do from the menu, according to their interests, abilities and learning preferences. The menus can be arranged so that pupils are required to conduct activities that focus on different skills over a period of time.

Finally, planning 'literacy events' throughout the year is an excellent way to engage learners with books and to get them to read and write. A literacy event is any type of celebratory event that aims to motivate everyone to read and write. For instance, a 'family literacy night' can consist of a family evening party where everyone takes part in different literacy games (Bingo, Scrabble, Finish the Story, drama improvisation). The students help with the preparations, including the design of flyers and posters (both of which require reading and writing) and deciding what events to include (helping develop oral skills and decision-making skills).

The learners' excitement in the preparation before the events will help make all students feel participative and show them that literacy is fun and important outside of the class. However, it is important to be aware that some learners may feel intimidated, uncertain or embarrassed to take part in these events. Keeping the events small at first can help build up learners' confidence to take part in larger events later on. Students should be encouraged but not forced to take part in the events, especially early on.

I learnt to read in my native tongue through phonics. Now they say it is not a good approach to teach reading to non-native speakers. Can I use phonics with my newly arrived students?

Phonics is a language teaching method that aims to help learners to begin their reading development by correlating sounds with symbols in an alphabetic writing system. And as with any teaching approach, phonics comes with advantages and disadvantages (Hardy, n/d).

Critics of phonics point out that this approach may promote reading without real comprehension of text. Due to its emphasis on phonemes and pronunciation, learners may sound like accomplished readers (correct enunciation) but may not fully comprehend the text. Non-native readers also do not have the same aural connection to the words being learnt and therefore will not help them make a connection between the written form of a word with words that they have heard or already know.

On the other hand, some experts argue that an adapted version of phonics is actually quite suitable for young learners because it can help those whose own script system is different from that of the language taught at school (and which may not rely on phonetic representation, such as Chinese). Through phonics pupils learn to associate sounds with letters or combination of letters, helping them with both their reading and their pronunciation. It also helps them learn correct spelling because it requires them to break down words into their components and they learn to 'sound out' different parts of a word in order to determine the letters needed to write it.

Moreover, this aspect means that learners of phonics are more likely to be able to tackle the pronunciation of unfamiliar words because they have learnt this technique. Finally, due to its emphasis on sound representation, on the breaking down of words and on the frequent repetition of target phonemes, the use of phonics may enhance learners' to recognize spelling patterns more easily and make connections between spelling and meaning. In turn, this would also enable them to more easily recognize spelling patterns in other words.

All teachers must find a balanced approach to teaching literacy to their newly arrived students. This often means adapting several different (and sometimes theoretically opposed) methods and strategies. The key is to find an approach that is comfortable for everyone –teacher and students- and which is well-rounded (covers all of the communicative competences) and effective for the learners.

References:
Hardy, Anne. (n/d). An investigation to establish the impact of synthetic phonics on teaching children with English as an additional language to read. Unpublished MA dissertation. Canterbury Christ Church University. Available at:

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How can teacher help newly arrived students develop their phonological and phonemic awareness in a new language?

Being able to recognize phonetic differences can be broken down into two types of skills sets: phonological awareness and phonemic awareness.

Phonological awareness is generally seen as a broad skill that comprises being able to identify and use units or segments of oral language (e.g. words, syllables, onsets -the initial part of words-, and rimes -the part of the word that follows the onset).

Phonemic awareness refers to a specific sub-skill of phonological awareness and implies being able to divide words into sounds (e.g. phonemes) and to blend these sounds to form new words.

Native speakers usually develop phonological and phonemic awareness during the pre-school and early childhood years, so that they gradually can recognize different, but similar words, based on phonemes (e.g. they and day in English) and generate new words by blending, segmenting or replacing individual phonemes (Cisero & Royer, 1995).

The development process of both phonological and phonemic awareness is long and complex but there are supporting strategies that teachers can implement. Here are a few ideas.

• First teachers should learn about all the phonemes of the target (school) language. Often native speakers are unable to label and list the different types of phonemes that belong to a language. This is not surprising as native speakers do not have a real need (usually) to apply metalinguistic reflection to a language they use every day with ease. However, teachers who are responsible for helping other learners gain access to their language should have explicit, declarative knowledge of the different aspects of the target language. This is important because it will help teachers create support materials. For instance, in English there are more than 40 speech sounds, many of which are not immediately obvious to fluent readers and speakers. Being aware of them can help the teacher know exactly what materials to create or locate.
• For early years, teachers should include skill-building in phonological and phonemic awareness in the lesson plans. This is beneficial for all the students, not only for the newcomers.
• For older students who may be past the age at which phonemic awareness and phonological skill-building are typically addressed, teachers could use pair-work, tutoring or group-work to develop these skills explicitly.

• Teachers should also develop materials and mini-lessons that work specifically on different phonemes, so that students slowly but steadily work their way through the different speech sounds.

• Children should be given opportunities to play with sounds –phoneme awareness could be promoted through games and songs.

• Teachers ought to consider whether their students need reinforcement or outside specific instruction to develop phonological and phonemic awareness.

References:

Cisero, Cheryl A., & Royer, James M. (1995). The development and cross-language transfer of phonological awareness. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 20(3), 275-303.