

MULLER Claudine / RISCHARD Nadine

Multiculturalism and deaf children in Luxembourg

The education of the deaf in Luxembourg differs from other European countries because of the specific situation of Luxembourg (Chiffres clés de l'éducation nationale, 2005, 7):

- Luxembourg (2586 km²) is the second smallest country of the member states of the European Union.
- The Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg has only 451.600 inhabitants (1.1.2004).
- Including 174200 inhabitants (38,6 %) from a foreign nationality, the country is multicultural.
- 14,1% of the inhabitants are Portuguese.
- 10,7% of the inhabitants come from our neighbour countries (Germany, France, Belgium).

In 2003/2004 the situation in our schools was as follows (Chiffres clés de l'éducation nationale, 2005, 19):

- The total number of pupils was 79251 including 36,4% children of a foreign nationality.
- In nursery-school (age 3-4) there were 3535 children of whom 40% were of a foreign nationality.
- In kindergarten (age 4-6) there were 10412 children including 43.2% children of a foreign nationality.
- In primary school (age 6-13) there were 32456 children including 39,2% children of a foreign nationality.

The Luxembourgish society is multilingual, due to the fact that the mother tongue of the Luxembourgish people and national language of the country is Luxembourgish, the official languages are French, German and Luxembourgish, the language of jurisdiction is French. We have to note that Luxembourgish is not commonly used as a written language (except daily use as for example for sms, email etc.).

The alphabetisation of the pupils in the first class takes place in German and this in a native kind of way!

The 'Centre de Logopédie' is the only specialised school in Luxembourg for deaf children aged between 0 and 16 years. It is a public school at the border of Luxembourg-City. Children with all degrees of hearing-impairment, but also children with a speech-disorder or a delay of the development of their language, are educated in the 'Centre de Logopédie'. A teacher of the 'Centre de Logopédie' is supporting the mainstreamed deaf children at a ratio of one hour per child per week.

Centre de Logopédie (Luxembourg) 2004/2005 (+/-250 children)

58 children with a hearing loss are educated at the nursery-school (10), at the kindergarten (6) and at the primary school (19) or supported in a mainstreamed area (23)

16 nationalities	16 different languages spoken at home	educational phase
22 Luxembourgish	16 Luxembourgish 1 Luxembourgish+Czech 2 Luxembourgish+English+ French 1 Luxembourgish+French+ Portuguese 1 German+Lux.+Italian 1 Luxembourgish+Cap verdian	2 nursery-school 1 kindergarten 3 Primary school 10 mainstreamed (5 primary school, 5 secondary school) 2 nursery-school 2 mainstreamed primary school 2 primary school
14 Portuguese	8 Portuguese 3 Portuguese+Luxembourgish 3 French	2 nursery-school 2 kindergarten 3 primary school 1 mainstreamed secondary school 3 primary school 3 mainstreamed (1 kindergarten, 2 primary school)
5 Italian	2 Italian 1 Italian+French 1 French+Luxembourgish 1 Italian+Luxembourgish	1 nursery-school 1 mainstreamed primary school 2 primary school 1 mainstreamed (secondary school)
2 Bosniac	2 Bosniac+German	1 kindergarten 1 primary school
2 Belgian	1 French 1 Luxembourgish+French	1 mainstreamed (primary school) 1 primary school
2 Spanish	1 Spanish+German 1 Spanish+Luxembourgish	1 nursery-school 1 mainstreamed (primary school)
1 Albanian	1 Albanian	1 kindergarten
1 Russian	1 Russian	1 primary school
1 Polish	1 German+Luxembourgish	1 primary school
1 German	1 German+Spanish	1 kindergarten
1 French	1 French+Luxembourgish	1 primary school
1 Croatian	1 German	1 mainstreamed (secondary school)
1 Dutch	1 Dutch+Serbo-Croatian	1 nursery-school
1 Chinese	1 Chinese	1 primary school
1 Nepalese	1 Nepalese	1 nursery-school

The educational situation:

- We have to cope with a small number of pupils **and their parents** with such diverse cultural backgrounds and range of languages. If you consider that nearly 50% of the pupils are foreigners with Portuguese, Italian or another language as mother tongue, one can imagine the challenge for the education of the deaf.
- The (mainly spoken) Luxembourgish language but also French are very important integration factors in social life. At the same time the written language is normally German or French.
Deaf children in kindergarten and primary school are educated in German, as German is also the language of alphabetisation and instruction for hearing children in the whole country (by decision of the ministry). Fortunately, in German, the grapheme-morpheme correspondence is very high. In the classes for deaf children, spoken language (German) is accompanied by signed German. (This is also a problem for parents who want to sign but don't speak German.) Nevertheless, only one year later in the second primary class French is introduced as a second foreign language.
- The parents visit clinical centres in different countries of our neighbourhood. Some children get a CI in Germany, other children in Belgium or France and the early hearing training of the implantation centres happens in different languages, depending which country or language the parents prefer. That makes the language situation in our nursery school even more complicated, because children in the nursery group need also to interact and speak together.

The resulting problems:

- A Luxembourgish child without hearing problems has to cope with a multilingual and multicultural environment. His mother tongue is not the language used in the teaching situations. A child with a mother tongue other than Luxembourgish has to learn German even if it has more facilities in French.

A Luxembourgish child with hearing problems has to learn German already in the kindergarten, but that is not the language spoken at home. A hearing impaired child often has problems to learn even one language properly, so you can imagine the difficulties to learn also French and later on even English.

- The situation for a child with hearing problems coming from a foreign country is even more difficult, because his parents will not be able to understand German and support him in learning this language. One can ask the question if a foreign mother tongue in our context has not the same consequences as a multiple handicap.
- Sometimes parents have different cultural backgrounds and opinions of education which may differ from the opinions of the Luxembourgish teachers.
- Some parents have difficulties to understand why their children are not being taught in French or English, because most of the teachers are able to speak those languages.
- The most specific concern of the education of the deaf in Luxemburg is the very small catchment area combined with the very large number of languages which

our children are confronted with. That is why it is nearly impossible to have homogeneous classes or even groups at our school, especially because the 'best' pupils are mainstreamed, and because we have also to cope with behaviour problems, multiple disorders, different educational phases, different ages of the children and different degrees of hearing impairment.

Our issues:

- Teach sign language to parents.
- Ask for interpreters if we don't know the parents language.
- Early intervention happens either in German or in Luxembourgish. Especially for children with a CI and good chances to get mainstreamed, Luxembourgish is chosen to guarantee a better social integration.
- In the actual nursery-school group 7 children (4 Luxembourgish, 2 Portuguese and 1 Italian) are educated in Luxembourgish and 3 children (1 Nepalese, 1 Dutch and 1 Spanish with a German father) in German.
- Choose German as the language spoken in kindergarten and primary school and make a difference between the language spoken at school and at home.
- We choose German also because it is the written language, children have to learn in primary school and we can already use this written language in kindergarten to introduce new words. This prevents confusion between the spoken and the written language.
- Introduce French as a second or third foreign language if the child has enough assurance in German and only when the alphabetisation in German is completed.
- Try to build groups with similar educational needs and backgrounds and change the constellation of the groups if necessary.
- Try to find the best solution for every child.

Case studies

We have been asked to present positive examples of multiculturalism and deafness. That's why we made the choice to present you one child of a multicultural background, whose evolution is going on quite well. On the other hand, we think that it might be an enrichment to present a case, which caused and still causes a lot of difficulties. This gives us the possibility to discuss solution strategies for children in similar situations and it makes clearer, where the problems can appear.

Oleg

Oleg was born on 13th of June 1993 in Kazakhstan. The family decided to leave their country in 2001. At that time they didn't know that they would arrive in Luxembourg, and this was of no great meaning to them. The only important thing was to leave!

The reasons the parents decided to leave, was not only their social and financial situation, but also the fact that they couldn't find adequate support for their hearing impaired son, Oleg, neither technical equipment nor special education. It seems that in their area in Kazakhstan still nowadays, deaf children are sent to school for mentally retarded or to normal school without any special support. Olegs parents didn't want either possibility.

The family came to Luxembourg and got the status of refugee for three and a half years. During this time the parents were not allowed to work. Oleg as well as his elder sister attended school.

In September 2001 Oleg was integrated in a first grade class of the Centre de Logopédie. As usual the alphabetisation took place in German. Oleg was a rather fast learner. Nowadays his vocabulary in German language is vast enough to give him the opportunity to express himself in an acceptable and clear way, even if his knowledge of the German grammar still remains on a low level.

At home parents, especially the mother, tried to help their son as much as possible. But none of them have any knowledge of the German language. Both started to learn French when they came to Luxembourg, so their possibilities to help their son with his studies are rather weak.

During all this time, Oleg had to deal with a lot of emotions:

- leaving his home-country and the social network he was accustomed to,
- fears and tensions inside the family, because of the uncertainty of their future, due to their time limited refugee status,
- living in social shelters for refugees,
- the very difficult social situation, because the parents were not allowed to work,
- his hearing loss increased.

As we all know, these are very difficult emotions for a child to deal with. Oleg, for a long time, felt aggrieved. Since in the meantime the family got the right to permanent stay and to work, Oleg feels reassured and calmed down. Also the family moved house and the parents, after a longer period of job search, at last found a job.

If we believe the parents, especially for him it would have been dramatic, if he had been sent back to Kazakhstan:

- no special education
- no adequate technical support
- not enough medical support
- no knowledge of the written Russian language, there would have been no future for this child.

In Luxembourg, after finishing school, he will have a chance to find, with support of the Centre de Logopédie, a job and to be integrated in society. He will always have the opportunity to find adequate hearing aid equipment and medical support.

Last school year Oleg started to learn French as well. Since his parents do the same, they can learn with their son and at the same time support him. For Oleg this means a new solidarity feeling with the rest of his family.

At the same time the boy is showing interest in learning Luxembourgish and tries to use it more and more in the conversation with his school friends.

Stephanie

Stephanie is the only child of a Belgian family living in Luxembourg. Today she is 12 years old and in the sixth class of primary school. That means that next year she will have to change school to go to secondary school.

Apart from French, the father is also able to speak German and Luxembourgish. Stephanie's mother is profoundly hearing impaired herself. Apart from spoken French she is using Belgian Sign Language as she absolved her school education in Belgium. She has nearly no contact to deaf people in Luxembourg. She is not signing with their daughter, because she doesn't want to ask too much of her. As we will see, her daughter has already to handle with three different languages. We still think that an important factor is also the fact that the father would not appreciate too much, if his wife and his daughter would sign together, because he would feel isolated.

The diagnosis of Stephanie's deafness is made at the age of 13 month, although there already were indications at the screening at the age of six months. A definite diagnosis of a profoundly hearing impairment is made at the university hospital in Brussels. She gets hearing aids at the age of 17 months and the early intervention is started in the Centre de Logopédie. The aided threshold lies meanly by 40 dB hearing lost.

Since the beginning the responsible teachers decided to use the German language in the early intervention sessions. First of all, it was unforeseeable at this moment, that Stephanie would be mainstreamed later on. On the other side, as German is the language of alphabetisation and instruction in primary school, this should avoid the introduction of a third language in the following years. Of course at home the parents continue to use the French language. Just before the entrance in kindergarten the language evolution in French is according to her age. She is progressing well in German too. Nevertheless the medical staff in Brussels and the teachers of the Centre de Logopédie give a recommendation to start school in a French speaking context. As an ideal solution in this sense cannot be found in Luxembourg the parents decide to let her start school in the regular kindergarten in their municipality. So against the intention of the teachers Stephanie is now confronted to a third language, because most of the children in her kindergarten class and of course the teacher use Luxembourgish. Fortunately there are some French speaking children too in the same class. These children are the most important contacts for Stephanie. Twice a week the supporting teacher of the Centre de Logopédie trains the German language with Stephanie, either at the Centre de Logopédie or at home. At the middle of the second kindergarten year, Stephanie begins to get tired of all this. It seems that the large number of languages she is confronted to and the concentration needed because of this situation are tiring the child. The school psychologist of the regular school is testing her whole evolution and finds out, that she is mature for school except for the evolution in Luxembourgish and/or German. A third kindergarten year is recommended, but the parents decide to let her daughter go to the first class of primary school.

The "Service de Rééducation Ambulatoire (SREA)", a supporting service for children with all kinds of handicaps, should insure 5 hours a week of supporting lessons while the Centre de Logopédie is continuing to support Stephanie outside school at a rate of two hours a week. Unfortunately there are a lot of problems with technical, political and organisational factors, which we cannot discuss in detail in this place. I will just give one example: The French speaking friends of Stephanie, who were one of the arguments to let her in regular school, are not going to the same class as she does and a change is not allowed by the persons responsible of the municipality! Also the teacher is nearly all the time speaking Luxembourgish in the class and not German as required by the curriculum. Another important factor is the total hostility of Stephanie's teacher to cooperation with the representatives of the Centre de Logopédie or the parents. This is why we decide, together with the parents and the child, to let her change the school. I will not discuss all the difficulties that mainstreaming of deaf children may result in, but focus on multiculturalism. Just in the same period when all those problems appeared, perhaps not

disjointed from the whole situation, Stephanie's hearing loss is increasing. She has to change hearing aids and does not cope with these all together well. In this situation she is asking her mother to teach her sign language. But her mother, again, does not want to add a new language. As already mentioned, we think that this decision is also taken because of a lag of acceptance from the part of the father. But at least her mother is talking with her ABOUT sign language.

Again all the possibilities about the choice of a school situation are discussed with the parents. As the supporting teacher of the deaf, I am voicing my support for the change to a school project of the ministry of education. In fact there is a French school working 20 minutes away from Stephanie's home. In the first class there are only 10 pupils at this moment. The alphabetisation takes place in French, but German is taught at a rate of one hour a day. The children can absolve there primary school in five years as usual in France and then go to a private French secondary school in Luxembourg or to a secondary school in the neighbourhood regions in France or Belgium. I am utterly convinced that this would have been the best choice for Stephanie. But again her father prefers to let her in regular school. He wants to leave all the ways open to his child. And he always refers to school law, which guarantees the same chances to all child in primary school including all necessary support. Unfortunately the real situation does not always correspond to the situation on the paper.

But fortunately a new class with a very cooperative teacher is found in the next village and Stephanie gets the possibility to finish her first class in a good and positive atmosphere. She is working very hard. Often the time for homework after class is exceeding two hours a day, without counting the supporting courses at the Centre de Logopédie. This is partially due to Stephanie's very reduced concentration span. On the other hand the hard job, she has to do, combined with a lot of frustration is reducing this span more and more during the year. In the second half of the year, that means when Stephanie is going to her new class, free writing and language comprehension in German are more and more requested. Stephanie needs more time than her class mates, especially than the Luxembourgish children, to acquire a new vocabulary and new grammatical structures. Sometimes she is just limping two weeks behind. But all this costs a lot of energy. This is too much for Stephanie. The very comprehensive teacher, the parents and the supporting teachers are agreeing in their opinion that Stephanie is highly overtaxed. They decide to let Stephanie repeat the first class. That means again new class mates, a new teacher, a new classroom!

At the end of the next school year Stephanie's level in German is really better and a base for the second class seems to be assured. The second year causes less problems, perhaps also because of the introduction of the French language, where Stephanie has some advantages compared to her Luxembourgish mates. At least at the beginning this is really the case. But in the following years the situation seems to be repeated. Stephanie cannot follow in German because German is taught like a mother tongue and the requested aims are too high to reach for her. One has to consider also that she has nobody at home, who can really help her to make up for what she did not catch at school. Her mother tries her best, but is learning the language only together with her daughter and making the same mistakes than her and than most of French people at the beginning of the learning process of the German language. Her father is a very busy engineer who often comes home only late in the evening. In addition to this the supporting lessons of the SREA are getting less and less from year to year and the supporting teacher of the deaf cannot conteract to all these difficulties.

Stephanie is now attending the sixth class. This means that at the end of the year a committee including her teacher, but also some other so called specialists who have none knowledge about deafness are deciding about the future of the education of Stephanie. Again the question of the choice of languages will take place, again it will be very difficult to find an adequate solution for Stephanie. As this example shows us:

- The Luxembourgish language is very important for the social integration. In the years that will follow, this will be even more important for her, because young people seek more and more verbal communication with their friends. If Stephanie stays in a Luxembourgish school context, she will have to cope with this situation. It had even been discussed to send her to the secondary school for deaf in Trier at the German border of Luxembourg to eliminate at least completely the Luxembourgish language.
- German language will stay in the three first years of secondary school the teaching language for all subjects, except French and mathematics. One can doubt that Stephanie will be able to catch the contents in all these subjects.
- Only in the 10th class the teaching language in all the subjects will change into French.

Unfortunately until now no ideal solution for this girl could be found...