

What Does Using a Shared Franco-German Toolbox Reveal About the Discourse of Teacher Trainers on Interculturality?

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ABSTRACT

From 2011 to 2015, the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO – Office franco-allemand pour la Jeunesse [OFAJ]/Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk [DFJW]) conducted a major research project entitled *La Valisette franco-allemande/Die deutsch-französische Kinderkiste*. The aim of the project was to explore teacher trainers' conceptions of language and interculturality through the use of a pedagogical and cultural "toolbox." This article explores the nature of interculturality in the specific context of early childhood education. It theorizes interculturality as both a polysemic and polemic notion and navigates between "renewed interculturality" in a "liquid approach" and an essentialist framework in a "solid approach." The study argues that analysing the discourse and meta-discourse of teacher trainers (called "multipliers") during focus groups on the shared toolbox is an effective way to explore the notion of interculturality.

KEYWORDS

Discourse Analysis, Identity, Intercultural Education, Teacher Trainers

1. INTRODUCTION

The project surrounding the creation of the *Valisette franco-allemande/Die deutsch-französische Kinderkiste*¹ pedagogical toolkit was part of an in-depth research initiative led by the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO/OFAJ) and piloted by a team of four researchers.²

This article will analyse representations of interculturality in the two contexts studied based on the discourse of teacher trainers – called "*multipliers*" – gathered during focus groups. These teacher trainers are professionals employed by the French National Education system and German early childhood education networks who received specific training from FGYO on using the *Valisette* before in turn organizing training courses at their respective workplaces. In most cases, the trainers³ had previously worked with FGYO and agreed with the choices and philosophy of the organization. They served as an interface in the FGYO project. As trainers, they help facilitate acceptance and adoption of the toolkit; they also organize training courses on its use and propose additional related activities, meaning they promote a conception of neighbouring languages/cultures in the realm of institutional early-childhood education. In this respect, their discourse was particularly interesting for our research since it involved re-compositions by those involved and these were necessarily incomplete given that the notion of interculturality is polysemic and even polemic.

The topic of interculturality is relevant to numerous fields including linguistics, anthropology, literature, the medical world, education and even applied geomatics and tourism (Gadal and

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Samsonova, 2014: 229). Its relevance in the field of language teaching means that there are endless possibilities for researchers to explore. The concept is understood differently in different geographical and sociological spheres and is referred to by terms as varied as Cultural Studies, multiculturalism and cultures, and can be imbued “with both English-style multiculturalism and French republicanism,” according to Vatz Laaroussi (2014: 269, translated here). It is in its reified, folklore-inspired side and through its association with the notion of nationalism that interculturality is most strongly contested in the scientific sphere (Dervin, 2014). Our observations adhere to a framework that opposes “differentialism-culturalism,” as criticized by Dervin (2009a), and an approach that embraces the “moving identity of a subject” (*ibid.*, translated here).

In an attempt to be comprehensive, we will examine how the *Valisette* resource affects the views of teacher trainers involved in interculturality and Franco-German cooperation. So, how do French and German teacher trainers seize on the notion of interculturality as an approach to develop when using the FGYO play-based, educational toolkit? This question introduces the idea that it is indispensable to closely combine a multi-dimensional methodological and theoretical framework that allows interculturality to be objectified. We therefore wanted to examine the meanings that intermediary practitioners – i.e. teacher trainers – gave to the notion of interculturality. Our findings underscore that the methodological stakes are high. We do not intend to generalize, nor to overlook aspects that do not fit neatly into categories. Lavanchy, Gajardo and Dervin (2011: 13) have emphasized that methodological issues must consider “the exceptions, instabilities and misappropriations.”

On a methodological level, our research and the technical choices we made to gather the opinions of the actors involved were strongly shaped by the understanding of interculturality vehicled by the *Valisette* in educational contexts. For one, we ruled out a culturalist approach since we knew that our observations and analyses would be based on a theorization of interculturality defined by notions of heterogeneity and instability due to the contexts and people involved. We had to think about how to capture the diversity of points of view, the contrasts, points of convergence and differences. We as such chose to focus on *what was said and how it was said* in exchanges between teacher trainers. Our methodological choices focused on an analysis of the points of view of actors from a discursive perspective by considering multiple voices (since the author of the words spoken is at times not the person talking), discourse dynamics (Salazar-Orvig, 1999) and theories of enunciation (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1999).

We will begin by presenting the *Valisette* pedagogical resource, then we will define the theoretical outlines of interculturality in the field of education. Next, we will explain the methodological approach behind our use of discourse analysis based on the theory of enunciation and dialogism. Our analysis is based on concrete examples drawn from excerpts of the corpus compiled from the teacher trainer focus groups. Lastly, we will discuss research pointers that, based on our findings, open the door to a renewed and broadened understanding of interculturality.

2. FROM A FRANCO-GERMAN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE TO COLLECTING STATEMENTS FROM TEACHER TRAINERS

2.1 What is the Valisette?

The *Valisette* is a “pedagogical resource” for 3- to 6-year-old children learning French or German in a formal educational context. The project is an FGYO initiative whose aim, according to Brougère *et al.* (2015: 3, translated here), is “to invite children to travel with puppets Tom and Lilou in a story they invent (travel, interaction, adventure), inspired by the imagination of the different actors involved and the suggestions found in the pedagogical handbook.”

The goals outlined by FGYO are “to promote early learning of the partner language” while also helping “contribute to debate and exchange between France and Germany on education and early learning” (FGYO, 2011, translated here). Brougère *et al.* (2015: 4, translated here) have noted,

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