

## Awakening to Languages: Preparing a Peaceful Multilingual World

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### **Abstract**

*Awakening to Languages (AtL) is a teaching approach that proposes multilingual activities and accompanies language teaching to foster the learners' awareness of and openness to multilingualism, while increasing their reflexive metalinguistic abilities. In this article, we describe ATL as a component of Didactics of Plurilingualism (DP) and its main aims and characteristics which will be illustrated through multiple examples of activities and teaching materials. We further discuss the reported effects of AtL on learners, teachers, and parents, followed by current trends in integrating AtL in schools. We then turn to a comparison of core concepts of AtL and DP to Translanguaging, noting a lack of the abundance of European research findings and teaching resources that might expand understandings of Translanguaging. The shared goal to highlight and promote all aspects of students' linguistic repertoire is noted across examples of practices. We conclude arguing the importance of AtL instruction to prepare learners for a more peaceful multicultural world.*

**Keywords:** *Awakening to Languages, Didactics of Plurilingualism, multilingualism, openness to diversity, translanguaging.*

### **A First Glimpse into Awakening to Languages: The Language Flower**

The school year has just begun. In this highly multicultural class in a French-speaking region, the pupils, aged 10-11, know virtually nothing about the linguistic background of their new classmates. The teacher suggests an activity that will help them to become acquainted and discover the languages that some of their classmates know. The teacher begins by asking pupils if they know anyone who speaks several languages, if they know what to call these people, etc. He or she introduces the terms *monolingual*, *bilingual*, *plurilingual*, *polyglot* and has the pupils look up the definitions in dictionaries, then asks volunteers what languages they speak, how they learned them, where they use them, etc. The teacher then distributes an *interview guide* with similar questions for pairs of students to tell each other their linguistic life story.

A class discussion follows, focusing on these languages and others they would

like to learn. Finally, the pupils write down the languages they know on separate petals of a flower. In this way, all the petals created by the pupils form a flower of languages, which is displayed and kept visible in the classroom throughout the year. Beyond the students' individual experience, this flower makes the plural linguistic knowledge shared by the class visible!

This example is a simplified version of a lesson (see FREPA website / Teaching and learning materials) adapted here to show a first example of an activity falling within the scope of Awakening to Languages (AtL). It is modest and brief, but very useful in creating an environment conducive to recognizing and acknowledging the multilingualism of the class by awakening students to the diversity of languages that are present in different ways (as for their use, the knowledge about them, the attitudes they induce). There are many, diverse AtL activities, covering a number of topics and objectives beyond the first example, several shared below.

## **Introduction**

Awakening to Languages represents one of the teaching approaches currently used, particularly in Europe, to accompany language teaching and to promote the development of competences for living in an increasingly multilingual environment while managing one's own linguistic repertoire and openness to otherness. This approach, which was initially developed in Great Britain but seems to be largely unknown in many parts of the English-speaking world, appears to us both as important from an educational point of view and as necessary in terms of living together.

In this article, which aims to introduce AtL to a wider English-speaking audience, we will first present AtL as a component of what is called *Didactics of Plurilingualism* (Section 1). We will then trace back its emergence and early developments (Section 2), before delving deeper into its main aims and characteristics, which we will illustrate with some examples of teaching materials (Section 3). This will lead us to the question of the observed effects of AtL on learners, teachers and parents (Section 4). After having reported on the dissemination of AtL (Section 5) and some current trends aimed at integrating AtL into other school and extracurricular activities (Section 6), we will conclude by returning to the question of the potential contribution of AtL for the intended target audience. Before we start, it's useful to mention that we are using the European distinction between "plurilingualism as a speaker's competence (being able to use more than one language) and multilingualism as the presence of languages in a given territory" (Beacco & Byram, 2003, p. 8).

## **Awakening to Languages : A component of Didactics of Plurilingualism**

Didactics of Plurilingualism (DP) emerged in Europe in the 1980s in connection with social developments such as a growing mobility of populations, migratory flows, and demands for minority language rights. This development is also linked to a growing awareness of the importance of plurilingualism as opposed to a prevailing monolingual linguistic ideology. The linguistic configuration of the European Union (which now has 27 member countries and 24 official languages) and its economic and political construction have undoubtedly played a catalytic role

in the development of a European concept of plurilingualism, clearly highlighted in the activities of the Council of Europe, a larger institution with 46 members (The Council of Europe and the European Union).

The founding of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in 1994, as well as the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) in 2001 and of the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* in 2003 (Beacco, & Byram, 2003) illustrate this commitment to plurilingualism. The CEFR supports this development by defining plurilingual and pluricultural competence as

[...] the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168)

This conception has taken advantage of research work done by psycholinguists and sociolinguists such as Grosjean, 1985; Lüdi & Py, 2003, and Herdina & Jessner, 2002 (for others, see Candelier & De Pietro, 2025).

In many European languages, terms like *didactic* can be commonly used as nouns and have been chosen in the former century to designate an autonomous scientific discipline, taking into account the various components of teaching and learning in terms of objectives, contents and processes in various contexts (Candelier & De Pietro, 2025). Didactics of plurilingualism (DP) is the discipline that aims to facilitate the development of plurilingualism, conceived as a competence of speakers. Most uses of DP seem to correspond, approximately, to those of *multilingual teaching and learning* in many English-speaking publications.

As indicated in Candelier & De Pietro (2025), we consider the following statement by Fonseca & Gajo (2016, p. 1483) as a first approach to the current understanding of didactics of plurilingualism: “Il s’agit [...] de travailler à partir de plusieurs langues, en direction de plusieurs langues ou, plus généralement, avec plusieurs langues” [It is about [...] starting from several languages, towards several languages or, more generally, with several languages]. Accordingly, DP is characterized by three key features: (1) it is teaching work that draws on more than one language; (2) this teaching work benefits any language (or variety of language) involved, regardless of its school or social status; (3) languages are not the only subjects that benefit from this work, as it proves useful to draw on all available linguistic resources when getting learners to build their knowledge in any subject (biology, mathematics, history, etc.) (De Pietro, 2003).

Most researchers in the field of DP view it as a key tool for implementing the *Plurilingual Education* promoted by the Council of Europe. In the *Guide for the development of Language education policies in Europe* published in 2003, the authors state that plurilingual education embraces “enhancing and developing speakers’ individual linguistic repertoires” (*Education for Plurilingualism*) and fostering “plurilingual awareness [...] refer[ring] to education, not necessarily limited to

language education, whose purpose is to educate for linguistic tolerance, raise awareness of linguistic diversity and educate for democratic citizenship” (*Education for Fostering Plurilingual Awareness*) (Beacco & Byram, 2003, p. 16).

Looking at the various expected effects of DP and/or the various teaching approaches that claim to be based on it, several contributors have suggested distinguishing between two facets which broadly refer to the same distinction (Beacco, 2020; Candelier & De Pietro, 2025; Cavalli, 2008; Gajo, 2006). Even if there is no perfect match between the teaching objectives referred to by the various terms used by each author, one of the two facets converges toward a single concept, that of language learning as supported by a teaching approach involving more than one language. The other facet covers a much less unitary field, more broadly related to general education. In our words, and as a general formulation of the goals of Didactics of plurilingualism, this didactics “intends to equip learners in order to prepare them to manage and enrich the plurality of their repertoire [facet one] and helps them better understand (and accept) what living in a multilingual world implies in terms of attitudes, representations and language practices [facet two]” (Candelier & de Pietro, 2025, p. 320).

ATL is a part of the Didactics of plurilingualism that falls mainly within the scope of facet two. It is one of the approaches brought together in the early 2000s under the umbrella concept *Pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures* (PA) (Candelier 2008), alongside the *Integrated didactic approach to languages* (Candelier & Manno, 2023), an approach comparable to Cummin’s *Teaching for transfer* (Cummins, 2008) but not limited to bilingual education, the *Teaching of intercomprehension between related languages* (Strasser & Reisner, 2022) and *Intercultural education* (see Candelier & Manno, 2023). Pluralistic Approaches to languages and cultures are defined as approaches that use teaching/learning activities involving several (i.e., more than one) varieties of languages or cultures.” They differ from usual language teaching approaches, which deal with each language in isolation and can therefore be regarded as “singular approaches” (Candelier et al., 2012, p. 6).

PA and DP are by no way distinct didactic bodies; the didactic area that PA seeks to delineate through its definition is seen as covering the same didactic practices as those that fall within the field of DP. The concept of PA is a proposal for structuring and better understanding the DP by pointing out the specific aims that identify the various approaches that make it up and had been never clearly distinguished from one another before (Candelier et al., 2012; Candelier & De Pietro, 2025). Among these approaches, ATL is characterized

- by the fact that it directly addresses linguistic and cultural diversity, in particular by having students work on/with a (large) number of languages (including the local language(s), other language(s) taught at school, languages spoken by the students, etc.);
- by the importance it gives to (often metalinguistic) analysis and reflection;
- by the fact that its ambition is not to proceed with the learning of a particular target language, but to prepare, support, and accompany this learning.

The following section provides a deeper understanding of the specificity of

AtL, by situating it in a wider knowledge of its history, aims, specific features and potential benefits.

### **Awakening to Languages: Emergence and early developments**

The origins of what we call AtL today clearly lie in the *Language Awareness* approach that first emerged in Great Britain under the decisive impetus of E. Hawkins (Hawkins, 1987; see also Donmall, 1985, and James & Garrett, 1991). Starting from a threefold concern about (1) the integration difficulties and frequent academic underachievement of students with migrant backgrounds; (2) the difficulties of English-speaking students in learning foreign languages; and (3) the difficulties of a significant number of students in their language of schooling, namely English, Hawkins proposed a different and complementary way of approaching language education, emphasizing competences such as observing, analyzing and comparing, applied to materials from many various languages. As we can see, these are elements that have been taken up by AtL (focus on linguistic and cultural diversity, working with several languages, emphasis on analysis and reflection, metalinguistic dimension). Hawkins and his team have published a series of booklets with activities covering areas as diverse as communication (discovering the particularities of human language), the diversity and evolution of languages (language families, loanwords), how language works (rules and functions that can be observed in various languages), how language is used (social and geographical varieties, etc.), spoken and written language (as well as different writing systems), language learning, etc. (Hawkins, 1987; Morwood & Warman, 1991).

Since the 1990s, similar approaches have been developed in other European countries, often under different names: in Germany (*Begegnung mit Sprache*: Haenisch & Thürmann, 1994), Austria (*Kinder entdecken Sprachen*: Kerschbaumer, 1998), Italy (*Educazione plurilinguistica*: Balboni, 1994), France (*Éveil au langage / Éveil aux langues*: Dabène 1995; Moore 1995), Switzerland (*Babylonia 2*, 1999), etc. In some countries, they have given rise to large-scale projects such as EOLE (Perregaux et al., 2003) and Eulang (Candelier, 2003).

The Eulang project, carried out at the turn of the millennium, has been particularly helpful in linking the various projects launched in various places. Conducted as part of the European Community's SOCRATES program, it brought together teams of researchers and educators from Austria, France (metropolitan France and Réunion Island), Spain, Italy, and Switzerland. It consisted in developing teaching materials for the final years of primary school and, above all, in testing and evaluating a one- to one-and-a-half-year AtL curriculum based on these materials in more than 100 classes in the various countries mentioned (Candelier 2003).

As we will see when considering the place of such approaches in some national or regional curricula (see section 5), AtL—again under different names and taking partly different forms depending on the languages concerned and the wider context—is now quite widespread in Europe but also in Canada (ELODIL – *Éveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique*; Dagenais & Armand, 2003-2005) and, to a lesser extent, in a few other countries.

It should be noted, however, that in some cases, activities presented as language awareness fall more broadly under the DP or even bilingual education. It should

also be pointed out that, somewhat paradoxically, the educational approach initially proposed by Hawkins under the name *language awareness* has often evolved into a more psycholinguistic direction, which differs from the didactic perspective we are adopting here; this is one of the reasons that led to the introduction of the term *Awakening to Languages*.

### **Aims and characteristics of AtL illustrated by examples of teaching materials**

As already mentioned in the Introduction, a wide range of teaching materials have been developed for AtL and are available in various educational contexts. These materials have in common that they get students working on several (varieties of) languages (including the local language(s), the other language(s) taught at school, the languages spoken by the students, etc.). They are generally of limited duration, so as not to overload the curriculum, and are usually rooted in active, (socio) constructivist pedagogy, which assumes that students build their knowledge and skills by manipulating multilingual materials and interacting with one another. The Evlang materials, for instance, were designed along these lines and were subject to quality criteria (usefulness, feasibility, relevance to the sociolinguistic context, topics likely to interest students). The materials systematically included a task contextualization phase, a research phase, and a synthesis phase, which formulated the learning that had taken place and its significance in terms of educational aims.

Today, various websites provide direct access to materials for AtL activities, in particular:

- the FREPA website ([carap.ecml.at](http://carap.ecml.at) > Materials) offers a database of approximately 150 teaching materials covering the various PA for all education contexts;
- the EOLE website ([EOLE - Education et ouverture aux langues à l'école](http://www.eole.ch)), in Switzerland, which offers more than 50 materials for preschool and elementary school levels;
- the ELODIL website ([ELODIL - Éveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique](http://www.elodil.ca)), in Canada (Québec), with materials covering preschool, elementary and secondary education;
- the PE-LAL website ([Plurilingual Education – Students' Language Awareness across educational Levels](http://www.pe-lal.dk)) in Denmark, which also covers all school levels.

The FREPA website, set up at the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), covers not only AtL but all PA (the same applies to the Danish website). Its teaching materials database specifies for each material the approach(es) addressed and also allows users to access materials by selecting them according to various criteria: type of approach, educational level, theme, objectives, language(s) of teacher's materials, language(s) of student's materials.

An example activity chosen when selecting "AtL" as an approach and "English" for the teacher's and students' documents, is an activity called *From the wisdom of European peoples*. Created by a Romanian team during an ECML Training and Consultancy Event (see Section 5), the activity focuses on discovering and analyzing proverbs in different languages. Subsequent information associated with this activity (see FREPA website / Teaching and learning materials) include:

- a summary: “The project starts with animal names in different languages and expressions using these names, comparing how they are used in typical expressions. Then students have to try to explain other expressions in Italian, English, French... A famous painting by the Dutch painter Brueghel that depicts many proverbs is used as a starting point to ask students to draw a picture representing a Romanian proverb, Romanian being their language of schooling;”
- the themes covered (animals, arts/heritage, proverbs), the source, the PA involved (e.g. Intercultural approach, AtL), the educational level (ISCED 2), the supporting material (texts, images), the languages involved (French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish), the language of the teacher’s documents (English) and of the student’s documents (English);
- links giving access to the teacher and student documents; and
- a list of what (Knowledge (K), Attitudes (A) and Skills (S)) the material helps to develop (see the descriptors below, Figure 1):

**Figure 1** FREPA Activity Descriptors

<p><b>K 6.2.1</b> Knows that the particular way in which each language expresses/ “organises” the world is influenced by culture.</p>	<p><b>K 13.2.2</b> Knows some resemblances/ differences between social practice/customs/ values/means of expression among different cultures.</p>	<p><b>A 3.2</b> Curiosity about discovering how (one’s own/other) language(s)/ culture(s) work(s).</p>	<p><b>A 5.3</b> Openness to languages/ cultures.</p>
<p><b>A 7.5.1</b> Motivation for the observation and analysis of more or less unfamiliar linguistic/cultural phenomena.</p>	<p><b>S 3.1.2</b> Can formulate hypotheses about linguistic or cultural proximity/ distance.</p>	<p><b>S 3.4.2</b> Can perceive indirect lexical proximity [using proximity between terms of the same family of words in one of the languages involved].</p>	<p><b>S 3.10.3</b> Can compare meanings/ connotations corresponding to cultural features {a comparison of the concept of time ...}.</p>
<p><b>S 7.3.1</b> Can profit from previous intercultural experiences to enrich his/ her intercultural competence.</p>			

These descriptors of activities are a key component of the tools offered by the FREPA website to support learning with PA.

As a general outline of what AtL activities can target, we would like to present four orientations that, while not exclusive, seem particularly crucial for this approach (further examples for each of these orientations can be found in the aforementioned teaching material websites and sources):

- activities aimed at discovering, acknowledging and increasing one's knowledge of linguistic diversity (and the cultural diversity it conveys);
- activities that focus on the linguistic dimensions of students' identity built through awareness and legitimization of their language knowledge and practices;
- activities aimed at developing students' reflective and metalinguistic abilities: observing, analyzing, comparing, discriminating (when listening to unknown languages, for example), that are useful and beneficial to language learning, including that of the language of schooling;
- activities aimed at bringing plurilingual practices into play.

Other ways of promoting the discovery of diversity and identity building and creating a *multilingual space* in the classroom (Perregaux, 1995) are obviously available, for example with greeting forms, their variety and the factors that generate their diversity in various languages and cultures (Launey, 2010), or through a *Bingo* game (EOLE website: [bingo.pdf](#)).

The first two listed activities were demonstrated in the aforementioned activities, the *Language flower* and *From the wisdom of European peoples*. Other activities enable additional steps to be taken in recognizing—and legitimizing—languages and varieties of languages that some students know to varying degrees, thereby contributing to their identity building. Examples include materials focusing on students' *linguistic biographies* (see Council of Europe : [European Language Portfolio \(ELP\)](#); EOLE website: [hanumsha.pdf](#)) or the production of what Cummins and Early (2011) refer to as *identity texts*.

When it comes to working on students' reflexive abilities, examples such as *Le cri des animaux* [animal sounds] (FREPA website: Materials; see also ELODIL website: Primary) or *Vous avez dit kikiriki ?* [Did you say cock-a-doodle-do?] (EOLE website: [kikiriki.pdf](#)) can be used, which allow students to hear the onomatopoeia of these sounds in various languages. Students can thus become aware that such differences between them rely on humans interpreting animal sounds according to the language they speak (sounds specific to each language) and not on animals producing different sounds within the same species. In other words, they discover in a fun way issues related to the relationship between *signifier* and *signified*, which can be totally arbitrary or partially linked to the object it refers to. This can help them to accept the idea that learning a new language brings us into a different organization of reality, forcing us to decenter ourselves. The call of the rooster lends itself particularly well to this discovery: *kickeriki!* in German, *jquiquiqui!* in Spanish, *cock-a-doodle-doo!* in English, *cocorico!* in French, etc. Such an activity also encourages students to listen carefully to material in several languages, thereby improving their listening

skills. Like many other AtL activities, it uses the “detour mechanism” (Perregaux et al., 2003; de Pietro, 2003); discovering how different idioms deal with language to produce meaning enables students to better address certain issues in a language they know or are studying, thanks to the distancing effect caused by comparison.

The *Europanto* material (FREPA website / Teaching and learning materials) provides us with a good example of an activity that brings plurilingual practices into play. It has been inspired by a language practice invented by a European diplomat, which involves mixing several languages in press articles that must nevertheless remain understandable to readers with some knowledge of European languages. The following is an extract from the material. The first task for the students is to draw on existing knowledge in the class to work out the meaning:

*Die Mutter van Toto lui demande to go shopping y le donne una liste de cosas zu kaufen. Seine Mamma le dice auch :- Bring la tua sorella mit ! Toto geht zum magasin, kauft todas las cosas, aber cuando er kommt zurück, seine little sorella tombe dans un loch und disappear. Cuando Toto arrives at home, seine Mutti le dice :- Wo ist ta little sorella ? Toto answers :- Elle est dans un loch gefallen.- Aber porque du hast elle nicht help um zu sortir ? dice la mother.- Porque no estaba escrito sur la liste! answers Toto.*

After having collectively reconstructed the meaning of this joke, reflected on how it is built and the strategies they have used to understand it, the students will in turn produce jokes, using the languages of all students and mixing them in a playful and understandable way, in a sort of *Classopanto* [humorous blend of languages spoken in the classroom].

In all these activities, the AtL perspective is threefold, with (1) a cognitive aspect (aimed at improving understanding of how languages work, regardless of their type or status); (2) sociolinguistic (aimed at greater legitimization of linguistic diversity, which the school is thus able to welcome and to which it can assign a status), and (3) psychological (such as approaches that lead students, particularly monolinguals, to step outside the rules of their own language to engage more easily in the learning of other languages) (de Pietro, 2003). It is therefore essential to work with a variety of languages, and in particular with languages linked to migration processes, which become more legitimate in the eyes of the students who speak them and also of their classmates when they are considered in the institutional context of the school.

### **Effects of Awakening to Languages on learners, teachers and parents**

A quantitative study of the effects of the Evlang program, based on pre- and post-tests and a comparison with a control group, was carried out at the end of a one-to-one-and-a-half-year AtL curriculum. It involved approximately 2,000 students in late elementary school (Candelier & Kervran, 2018). The qualitative evaluation focused essentially on some twenty classes. Two areas of objectives—the effect on attitudes, and the development of language related aptitudes—were investigated, each with two dimensions: interest in diversity and receptiveness to the unfamiliar, memorization / listening discrimination and syntactical analysis skills of compound elements (both on unknown languages).

For both areas, the impact of AtL on the first dimension (interest and listening skills) is statistically confirmed in a large majority of samples. The effect was also shown for the second dimension (receptiveness and morphosyntax) albeit in only a few samples. Both differences can be explained; receptiveness is more demanding than simple interest, and listening activities were more frequent than syntactical ones within the curriculum. All the effects correspond to a curriculum lasting an average of 35 hours. More detailed calculations involving the actual number of hours for each class (which varied from seven to 95 hours) clearly showed that a longer course has more chance of leading to more generalized effects with a broader scope. Moreover, it could be shown that lower-achieving pupils benefitted most from the effects of AtL on attitudes and that AtL develops a desire to learn languages, particularly minority languages, including those of migrants. A majority of students found AtL useful, even if the reasons for its usefulness were not always perceived or clearly expressed. As one young pupil said during a post-test interview: “Awakening to languages, it’s for opening the world of languages” (Candelier, 2003, p. 179).

Concerning teachers, the study shows that the practice of AtL has led many of them to be more sensitive to the presence of students in their classroom for whom the schooling language is not their first language and to make use of their resources. For most of these elementary school teachers, referring to several languages simultaneously was seen as natural. They became convinced that AtL strengthens the pupils’ metalinguistic aptitudes as well as interest and openness to otherness. However, their convictions seemed to be more firmly established for students’ attitudes than for abilities.

As for parents, the vast majority were positive about AtL, especially when they had the opportunity to get to know it and—even better—to participate in (Candelier, 2003). This was corroborated by findings from an investigation conducted during the Evlang follow up project *Janua Linguarum*, which however showed that some parents were “concerned that the approach might take the place assigned in the curriculum to teaching a particular language (English especially)” (Zielińska, 2003, p. 170). For more information about the effects of AtL in the Evlang program, see: Candelier, 2003; *Janua linguarum* website / Autres documents / Le bilan du programme européen Evlang).

These findings have been integrated into the literature review about the effects of “language awareness in mainstream and language classrooms” by Sierens et al. (2018). Although the authors of this contribution use the term *language awareness*, the definition they give of it (p. 21) shows that their review does relate to what we call AtL. It relies on a systematic examination of the research literature and refers to 40 studies (36 from Europe and North America) sorted out for their methodological quality or originality, 34 dealing with learners, 12 with teachers and two with parents (some of them deal with more than one category of participants).

With regard to the effects on students, the authors sum up as follows (p. 68–69): “There is some limited yet relatively convincing evidence for positive effects of LA [language awareness] interventions and programmes [sic] in the affective [like ‘positive attitudes towards linguistic (and cultural) diversity’] and social [like ‘better engagement and integration of (immigrant) minority students in linguistically diverse classroom’] domains [...]. The evidence for benefits in the cognitive domain

(metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness) [when listening to different sounds and learning to differentiate them, guessing meaning from transparent words, and drawing parallels between languages] is on the whole positive. An incipient impact was also noticed in the power domain (critical LA) [minority students becoming ‘more aware of the relative status of languages, of power issues at play in language contact,’ and developing ‘critical stances that can serve as a means of ‘linguistic self-defense’] in a limited number of studies.” No effect on proficiency in the school/second language and in second/foreign language teaching was found, except when these teaching programs “explicitly use CA [contrastive analysis] as a metalinguistic technique.” Finally, the studies provided some evidence for the influence of length of intervention as well as some possible effects of categories of pupils (for both aspects, see Evlang above).

With regard to the findings for proficiency in second languages, it should be reminded that AtL is not in itself an approach for teaching languages, but that it can prepare or support such teaching. The reference to approaches using contrastive analysis confirms the need to use other pluralistic approaches for language learning, in particular the *Integrated didactic approach to languages*, which can however benefit from the metalinguistic competences developed by AtL (Candelier & Manno, 2023). As for the effects of AtL on the development of metalinguistic competences pursued in regular school language classes (not specifically as a second language for allophone learners), it can be added that a study conducted in Switzerland with seven- to nine-year-old students led to contrasting results, revealing areas where AtL is particularly effective (identification of text types), effective under certain conditions (for choosing the correct spelling for the transcription of a phoneme) and non-effective in others areas where it has no visible effect (Balsiger et al., 2012).

Sierens et al. (2018) observed that research data on the impact of LA interventions on teachers are still limited. However, “the available evidence makes it likely that participation in LA projects furthered positive attitudes towards language and language diversity among teachers, and contributed to their greater acknowledgement of bilingual learners’ identities and competences” (p. 72). As for parents, their findings refer to “positive effects in the social domain: the relations between parents and teachers and among the parents seem[ed] to have improved [as well as] in the affective domain [since] the results indicate[d] that immigrant parents felt more encouraged to maintain their mother tongues at home” (p. 73).

Further research work, confirming or complementing the preceding studies, was conducted in northern European countries within two projects entitled DELA-NOBA (2013–2016 – *Developing the Language Awareness Approach in the Nordic and Baltic Countries*) and PE-LAL (2020–2023 – “Plurilingual Education – Minority and Majority Students’ Language Awareness across Educational Levels”; see [PE-LAL website](#)). The first project, conducted in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden, focused on activities designated as language awareness (LA) but with a content very similar to AtL (Daryai-Hansen, Levefer, & Rimsane, 2019).

The second project, conducted in Denmark, involved several pluralistic approaches. The study conducted among students participating in the PE-LAL program provides further insight into what has been said about pupils’ interest in AtL. Across grade levels, this interest appears to be greater than that generated by

other pluralistic approaches used (Integrated didactic approach to language and Teaching of intercomprehension between related languages). AtL “stimulates the students’ language curiosity and develops their language awareness both in relation to lower levels of language (e.g. phonology, orthography, lexis/semantics) and higher levels of language (e.g. text linguistics)...[It opens] the students’ eyes to both global mobility and the opportunities for living and exploring the world of today as well as acknowledging linguistic diversity” (Daryai-Hansen & Drachmann, 2024, p. 10).

Like the teachers involved in the experimentation settings referred to above, the 13 primary and lower-secondary school teachers asked in the DELA-NOBA project “believed that LA [= AtL] activities had resulted in positive outcomes for their pupils,” being “surprised at how even young pupils began to notice language structure and morphological differences” and gaining “an understanding of how LA activities could benefit minority pupils.” They also became aware of the positive outcomes for themselves; they “began to notice differences and similarities between languages and learned to decode words with limited knowledge of the language” (Daryai-Hansen, Levefer & Rimsane, 2019, p. 36). As part of the DELA-NOBA project, a study conducted on a limited number of schools (one Danish school, one Finnish school and one Icelandic school) confirmed (see Evlang above) that most parents view AtL activities as positive for their children’s development. But it could not show any real breakdown in the usual language hierarchies with regard to the choice of languages for their children to learn (Daryai-Hansen, Layne & Levefer, 2018, p. 67, 72).

We will close this collection of findings with those from a study of the implementation of an AtL program over the course of two years at the end of the elementary school in Québec (Lory, 2015), that also highlighted positive effects on the students’ representations of linguistic diversity and the development of a positive image of the languages in their plurilingual repertoire. In addition, it could show for participants with weaker academic skills an increased investment in *Language Awareness* activities.

### **The dissemination of Awakening to Languages – some insights**

The previous sections have provided some examples of the spread of AtL, notably in terms of teaching material development and research programs. For these two aspects, a review of the contributions presented at the biannual conferences of the international association EDiLiC (Education and Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: <https://en.edilic.org/>), founded in 2001 specifically to promote AtL, will provide an overview of the increasing diversity of national and regional contexts where initiatives have been taken. Even though the majority of these are located in Western, Nordic and Central Europe and Canada, other parts of the world are present, notably Japan and Brazil.

In Europe, the presence of AtL—among other Pluralistic approaches—on the website of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML) plays an important role in its dissemination, raising awareness among educational authorities and training teachers in these approaches, not only in Western and Central Europe, but also in geographically more distant countries such as Armenia and Malta. AtL is given a major place in the presentation of the

*Training and consultancy* services that the ECML offers for these approaches (ECML Training and consultancy Webpage / Offers / Plurilingual and intercultural education). The European Union's *Erasmus+* program is another dissemination vector for AtL, present in several projects such as LISTIAC (Linguistically Sensitive Teaching in All Classrooms; see <https://listiac.univ-montp3.fr/clip>) or the SERAFIN project (Explorer les biographies langagières: une démarche pour la formation et la valorisation du plurilinguisme; [Serafin Project website](#)), devoted to facilitating the inclusion of refugees in universities.

In this article, it is not possible to go into detail about each of the countries where AtL activities exist. However, for more details on Europe, we can point to the countries and regions where research and material production activities are most active. These are, in particular, Austria, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain (Catalonia and the Basque Country), Switzerland and to a certain extent Belgium, Germany and Slovenia.

In some countries, educational authorities have decided to publish AtL materials. This is both an important means of dissemination and a clear sign of institutional recognition. This is notably the case in the French speaking part of Belgium (De Grieve, 2020), in the Czech Republic (Havlínová et al., 2023), in France (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la jeunesse, 2023) and in Luxembourg (Perregaux & Tonnar, 2010). In most of these countries, elements of AtL have also been explicitly incorporated, in various forms and under various names, into the curricula (see Section 6).

The study by Jaekel et al. (2024), who investigated the curricula of three countries (Finland, Germany, and Norway) in order to find out the extent to which these consider PA, including AtL, clearly shows that some of the principles of these approaches can be found there. The authors report, "cultural diversity, multilingualism, heterogeneity, and the presence of different languages in the classroom are considered valuable," "[m]ultilingualism as a resource in school and society is highlighted," but also that these curricula do not specify in what ways, with which teaching procedures, schools or teachers may acknowledge and promote plurilingualism and intercultural understanding (Jaekel et al., 2024, p. 249). This is also true of many other curricula in Europe, which furthermore often tend to restrict their reference to multilingualism, interculturalism, and openness to diversity to the early stages of education (preschool, primary school), to classes with a particularly high number of students from migrant backgrounds, or to special classes set up to integrate these students.

However, a few curricula are an exception and explicitly refer to approaches related to PA, including AtL. This is the case, as we have already announced, in Luxembourg, where the website of the Ministry of Education (Gouvernement du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg, 2011) states that for children in Cycle 1 (aged 4 to 5), "the skills to be acquired fall within the following areas of development and learning: [...]: language, the Luxembourgish language, AtL (termed *éveil aux langues*) and an introduction to the French language [...]." In Cycle 2 (ages 6-7), the skills focus on literacy, German, French, and Luxembourgish, as well as AtL (termed *ouverture aux langues*).

In a "Declaration on Language Teaching Policy" (CIIP, 2003: *Déclaration*), the

educational authorities in the French-speaking part of Switzerland have explicitly given languages of migration and AtL a place in the curriculum. “Languages of migration also have their place in a coordinated approach to language teaching and learning. (...) In the same spirit, modules such as *éveil aux langues* [this means AtL] are also offered.” In the *Plan d'études* [curriculum] that was subsequently developed to put this policy orientation into practice (*Plan d'études romand*), a same and unique domain (called *Languages [Langues]*) is defined for all languages: L1, L2, L3, classical languages, migration languages, a domain that also includes “reflection on the relationships between languages.” Students are thus encouraged to “discover how language and communication work, to develop [their] interest and [their] motivation for languages, in particular through *éveil aux langues* [AtL] activities.” The EOLE materials, distributed to all teachers and available online (*EOLE - Education et ouverture aux langues à l'école*), provide ways to achieve the learning objectives set out in the curriculum in a thematic area called *Interlinguistic Approaches*.

Since 2015, French preschool curricula have also referred to AtL under the terms “awareness of linguistic diversity” or “awareness of languages” [*“éveil à la diversité linguistique”* or *“éveil aux langues”*] (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2019). This also applies to the programs in the French-speaking part of Belgium (De Grieve, 2020), in Finland, in Val d'Aosta (Italy), and in the Swiss canton of Ticino. More detailed information on the last countries and regions can be found on the FREPA website (FREPA website / Using FREPA) (see also Daryai-Hansen et al., 2014).

With regard to teacher education, initiatives have been taken in many contexts, sometimes by educational authorities, sometimes by universities and other academic institutions, most often in connection with research conducted there. Here again, many references can be found in the proceedings of the EDiLiC association conferences (EDILIC website: <https://en.edilic.org/>; for example, Balsiger et al., 2012).

### **Integrating Awakening to Languages into other school and extracurricular activities**

In connection with the dissemination of AtL, the question quickly arose as to whether it was advisable that it constitutes a school subject, just like biology or the teaching of a particular language, or whether it would be preferable to have it integrated into existing subjects, and possibly even into extracurricular projects. The dominant trend currently remains that of independent activities and dedicated websites, yet some interesting initiatives are opening avenues for such an integration. Today, some language teaching textbooks introduce other languages within activities focusing on specific aspects of the language taught (vocabulary, grammatical categories such as gender or plural, etc.) in order to raise awareness about the variety of available solutions for constructing meaning and telling about the world, thus highlighting similarities and differences (for example, the *Millefeuilles* textbook for French in Switzerland: *Millefeuilles / Schulverlag plus*; cf. Egli Cuenat et al., 2018). Furthermore, in the textbook *Ilots de plurilinguisme en classe d'histoire* [Islands of plurilingualism in history class] (Lambelet & Mauron, 2015), students' learning of history is supported by reading texts in the original language of some of the

documents, drawing on the knowledge that some students may have of specific languages or on intercomprehension strategies. Again, such a project is in line with AtL by opening students' minds to linguistic diversity and showing them through practice that diversity can contribute to learning (de Pietro, 2003).

We also would like to mention what is currently being done with oral tales and the many youth literature books that combine several languages (Audras & Maillard de la Corte Gomez, 2021; Deschoux, 2021), thus exploiting this plurality and giving rise to activities that can be classified under the four areas outlined in section 3. The topic of the latest EDILIC conference was indeed *Plurilingual Literacies in Education* (EDiLiC website / Événements / Congrès). Books available in several languages are used notably in many projects for very young children based on *story boxes* (Bezault & Guyader, 2015) or on *sacs d'histoires* [story sacks], which contain various versions of a story in a few widely spoken languages and, where possible, in the students' family languages, which children are then invited to discover with their parents (Vernetto, 2017).

In addition, AtL is increasingly at the heart of projects that implement communicative, action-oriented approaches, involving both various disciplines (arts, geography, etc.) and other actors (cultural mediators, parents, etc.). One example is an Andorran project that was also developed during an ECML Training and Consultancy event, which focuses on discovering how yogurt is made. This project involved several disciplines (biology, history, etc.) and drew on several languages, in particular the three languages used in the Andorran principality (Catalan, Spanish, and French), which the students were asked to decipher, compare, and translate.

Also worthy of mention, alongside the school setting, is the creation of multilingual Kamishibai (a Japanese storytelling technique based on images scrolling in a small theater), an activity that involves building a theater [*buntai*], writing a multilingual story, and giving a public presentation. The creation of Kamishibai has given rise to an international award, initiated by the association *D'une langue à l'autre* (DULALA), which is enjoying ever-increasing success (<https://dulala.fr/plurilingual-kamishibai-contest/>; see also Chenouf, 2023; Deschoux et al., 2022).

Other projects developed in collaboration with museums should also be of interest to readers, such as the PASTEL (Plurilingualism, Art, Sciences, Technology, and Literacies) project, which brings students from highly multicultural classrooms to museums and engages them in plurilingual activities based on the objects exhibited (Moore 2017; 2021), as well as various activities developed based on *linguistic landscapes* which invite students to leave the classroom to discover the linguistic and semiotic diversity of their environment and then analyze and decipher it (Dagenais et al., 2009; Moore & Haseyama, 2019; Oyama, Moore & Pearce, 2023).

## **Conclusion: Awakening to Languages as an asset for schools in Europe and elsewhere**

Despite recent worldwide developments towards nationalism and identitarian closure, there is a genuine desire in many countries, among educational stakeholders, to value multilingualism and plurilingualism, and even to take advantage of them for learning and education purposes. This also applies to many school curricula, even if some official statements appear to be mere window dressing (disingenuous) or,

in Europe, an attempt to comply with overall European policy, without necessarily leading to action with concrete steps.

AtL and DP are reliable tools for achieving such goal in valuing plurilingualism. As its own approach among DP, AtL still faces several challenges:

- The aims, main contexts, and specific methods of the various approaches that claim to be part of DP must be clearly expressed. This is what we have attempted to do here for AtL in relation to other pluralistic approaches such as *Bilingual teaching*, *Content and Language Integrated Learning* or *Immersive language learning*, that are only a part of DP when they include several languages, crosslinguistic comparison phases, and phases of switching from one language to another within lessons (Gajo, 2008; Candelier & de Pietro, 2025; Gajo, 2008).
- In order for AtL activities to effectively contribute to openness to diversity and recognition of the plurality of languages and their speakers, it is important to prevent certain drifts, which can occasionally be observed, from inadvertently reinforcing certain stereotypes or giving rise to inappropriate views; it is for instance risky to associate languages with flags, as languages are often spoken in several countries, which in turn can be multilingual. It is also important to avoid associating countries themselves with caricatural and overly simplifying symbols such as the Eiffel Tower or cowboys.
- Efforts to convince teachers, education leaders, and parents to integrate AtL more widely into mainstream education must be stepped up, addressing material obstacles, particularly those linked to traditional school organization, and above all obstacles linked to beliefs (Andrade et al., 2007). This requires not only more training for education stakeholders but also clarifying the issue for society as a whole.

By disseminating knowledge about Didactics of Plurilingualism, we hope to mobilize others interested in the goal of valuing plurilingualism.

In a recent publication about DP, Candelier and de Pietro (2025) expressed the need to make better known, outside Europe, the body of reflection and concrete experience it has built up over the decades. This is what we intended to do here for AtL. We hope to share our plurilingual trends and research findings to educational scenes in the non-European countries. Focusing on the United States, similarities can be seen between AtL and some developments that originated there under the term *Translanguaging* (García & Wei, 2014), which have also generated interest among researchers and practitioners across the globe, including in Europe.

In Italy, Carbonara & Scibetta (2019) provide examples of what they call translanguaging activities for students with migrant backgrounds. The first two types of activities referred to are characteristic of AtL (orientations 1 and 2 in Section 3 above). They are the linguistic biography and the creation of a linguistic landscape in the classroom that takes into account all of the students' languages. The third type of activity brings together various modalities of group work on multilingual texts (language of schooling and the language of origin) in both comprehension and production, in which students are actively engaged (see also Cognigni, 2021, p. 11).

Depending on the texts and procedures used, these activities fall either under (1) the 4th Atl orientation identified in Section 3 (bringing plurilingual practices into play) as exemplified in the activity that used the Classopanto material or (2) genuine language of schooling learning activities, which by definition (see Section 1) fall outside the scope of AtL.

Given the similarities between translanguaging and DP, some European scholars involved in DP remain disappointed their scholarly contributions have not been taken into account by Translanguaging promoters and even, in a more radical version, believe that the concept of Translanguaging has contributed nothing beyond what European concepts and accomplishments have already made available (Cavalli & Egli, 2024).

Regarding the United States, there are some significant differences compared to the linguistic configuration specific to Europe. The latter is based on numerous languages that are of great importance to the identity of their speakers. These languages are deeply rooted in history, whether they are fully recognized national languages of a state (e.g., the official languages of the European Union) or regional/minority languages that are recognized to varying degrees (e.g., Breton in France, Catalan in Spain, Same in the Nordic countries, non-territorial Romani, etc.), or even linked to sometimes ancient waves of migration (Arabic in France, Turkish in Germany, etc.).

In addition, Europe is facing the rise of English, which in many contexts tends to take precedence over the languages traditionally used there, sometimes replacing other languages traditionally taught in schools. This situation is perceived, by some educators and parts of society, as a threat to the future of these languages. It therefore seems difficult in Europe to question the existence of distinct languages, as some Translanguaging theorists do. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to relativize the boundaries between languages in educational settings to promote practices, as Translanguaging does, that use mixing languages in order to construct meaning, thus contributing to both language and subject learning. *Crosslinguistic translanguaging*, which takes up the idea of an underlying proficiency model but without denying the existence of languages, is a possible match between AtL and Translanguaging.

Beyond the issues discussed above, it is the convergences between the two educational approaches that should be kept in mind. For AtL and the facet of DP that it represents, these convergences can be summarized as follows: AtL and translanguaging share a strong common interest in highlighting and promoting all aspects of students' linguistic repertoire in teaching; they also share a deep concern with "equitable education for all" (García, 2023, p. 101). For these convergences, which can undoubtedly facilitate the dissemination of AtL among teachers and researchers familiar with Translanguaging, see also Candelier & de Pietro (2025, p. 327) and Cognigni (2021, p. 9).

Linguistics has taught us that languages convey a worldview that is notably expressed through the way in which (morpho)syntax is organized (categories of gender and number, temporal categories, etc.) and the way things are named (like *Gulf of Mexico vs Gulf of America*). Beyond language teaching—or rather, alongside language teaching, to which it contributes by developing elements of knowledge, attitudes and skills which are useful for any language learning—, AtL aims to share

such insights with students through activities that help them discover and better understand language, including their relation to their own idiom(s) and those of their classmates. It is therefore less a question of arguing about languages (their beauty, their usefulness, etc.) than of getting students to work with several languages, exploring their diversity and their potential in terms of human creativity.

We are living in a time in history when some people tend to deny diversity in all its forms and impose a single way of describing the world (their way) and one single language (their own). This is precisely what makes ATL increasingly crucial.

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