

L1 EDUCATION IN TIMES OF GLOBALIZATION, DIGITALIZATION AND SUPER-DIVERSITY: A PLEA FOR AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EMPIRICAL-INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

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Abstract

This introduction first briefly sketches the (history of the) International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN). IMEN was founded in 1981 as an information and research network that over the years initiated an empirical-interpretive research program focusing on comparative analyses of the rhetoric and practices of L1 education across a dozen of European countries. Main elements of IMEN's methodology that will be discussed below were the development of different types of research collaboration, a theoretical framework for comparative analysis, and a method for international triangulation. It then describes how, at the turn of the century, IMEN's way of doing slow science became increasingly threatened by the requirements of publish or perish mainstream research, and how its research program was confronted with the challenges posed to L1 education by processes of globalization, digitalization, and super-diversity, becoming manifest in the superdiverse nature of student bodies, their sociolinguistic and ethnocultural doings, and the increasingly digitalized modes of teaching and learning they are exposed to. All these elements, in one way or another, also have an impact on the teaching-learning practices in mainstream L1 education and consequently must be addressed by IMEN-like studies. Finally this contribution briefly introduces the contributions to this special issue and suggests that they are a strong argument for a renewed interest in international comparative discussion on and around L1 education and a plea to further collaborative research from an empirical interpretive ethnographic perspective on teachers' professional practical knowledge and classroom practices that can guide our understanding of the ubiquitous school subject L1 education that aims at preparing students for a global, digital, and super-diverse society.

Keywords: comparative education, L1 education, classroom ethnography, triangulation, professional practical knowledge

1

S. Kroon & M. Spotti (2024). L1 Education in times of globalization, digitalization and super-diversity: a plea for an international comparative empirical-interpretive approach. L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature, 24, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.21248/l1esll.2024.24.2.673>

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1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction to this special issue of *L1* dealing with L1 education in times of globalization, digitalization, and super-diversity has a threefold aim. First, it aims to present and celebrate the international comparative research efforts of the International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN) that, back in 1981, had initiated an empirical-interpretive ethnographic research program focusing on the comparative analyses of the rhetoric and practices of L1 education across a dozen of European countries. We honor this effort not just out of courtesy to the hard work of bygone colleagues but also because we are convinced that the IMEN research approach is still worth noting and clearly represents more than just a stroll down memory lane. Second, this introduction also aims to go into the challenges that L1 education across present day Europe faces in concomitance with globalization, digitalization, and super-diversity, leading to new questions regarding the school subject's own content, its teaching methodology, its appeal to students, and its societal implications for national identity at large. Third and last, this introduction aims to briefly present the contributions included in this special issue that has resulted from a (final) IMEN Expert Meeting held at Tilburg University in October 2022. Whereas these contributions span across Belgium-Flanders, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, they also include the outsider, yet familiar, perspective of Australia, given the similarities in its L1 curriculum and teaching tradition with the rest of the countries involved.

We hope that this special issue will inspire both new generations of researchers and teacher educators in the field of L1 education in Europe to further engage in joint comparative research that through an ethnographic lens tries to make sense of what happens in L1 classrooms characterized by globalization-led mobilities, digitalization, and super-diversity contributing to the further development and improvement of this school subject that is central to students' development to autonomous and critical citizens that have learnt to make their voices heard both within the classrooms' walls as well as in society at large (Juffermans & Van der Aa, 2013).

2. WOLFGANG HERRLITZ' INITIALZÜNDUNG

In a typed and xeroxed letter, dated 3 November 1981, hand-signed and sent via ground mail, Wolfgang Herrlitz, the then recently appointed German professor of German Linguistics at Utrecht University, invited (in Dutch) colleagues with an interest in *moedertaalonderwijs* (mother tongue education) for a meeting to discuss the possibilities of documenting international developments in this field, i.e., L1 education, so to make such developments available for theory formation to other scholars and for practical use to educational professionals. The letter had an Appendix (in German) where Herrlitz added some notes entitled *Zur internationalen Diskussion in der Muttersprachdidaktik* (On the international discussion in mother tongue didactics) where he referred to the 4th Edition of the *Symposion Deutschdidaktik*

(symposium on German didactics) in Frankfurt am Main that had taken place in the very same year. From the symposium's contributions, Herrlitz had concluded that there was a widespread interest in mother tongue didactics across other countries, however, at the same time, he had observed that a real international perspective was missing and that the exchange of information on projects and developments in other countries was still rather superficial and thus in need of urgent attention. In his notes, Herrlitz formulated four questions (originally in German):

- 1) Is it useful to establish a center that documents important international developments in the field of mother tongue education and that has access to relevant sources and contacts?
- 2) Is it possible to establish a conceptual framework where someone can further discuss, develop, and integrate concepts of mother tongue education from other countries, both in terms of their theoretical foundation as well as their practical relevance?
- 3) Are there forms of representation that can convey conceptually organized international discussions on the one hand, and theoretical as well as practical developments in a specific country, on the other?
- 4) What kind of organizational format between disciplines and institutions would be useful for answering these questions?

These four questions were meant to fuel the discussion Herrlitz had invited his colleagues to participate in and that he had addressed as "*Initialzündung*" (initial spark) for what later became IMEN.

3. IMEN: WHAT'S IN A NAME

The acronym IMEN stands for International Mother Tongue Education Network, an organization that was formally established in 1982 in the Netherlands with financial support of the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO). Following Herrlitz' above mentioned 1981 note, it aimed at building a European network of correspondents as a first step in achieving the aims of information exchange, conceptual and practical development, and international comparative research in the field of mother tongue education in Europe. The term 'mother tongue education' was meant to refer the teaching of the official/national/standard language in mainstream primary and secondary education. The school subject that engaged in teaching this language and that in the curriculum was, and still is, generally referred to with the name of this language—Dutch, French, English, German—was then, across many countries, traditionally referred to as mother tongue education—or its equivalents *moedertaalonderwijs* in the Netherlands, *Muttersprachunterricht* in Germany, *modersmålsundervisning* in Sweden, *morsmålsundervisning* in Norway, and *pédagogie de la langue maternelle* in France. IMEN also opted for this common name and right from the start used the acronym MTE as shorthand to refer to the school

subject that all countries had in common, irrespective of its different name across each country.

This name, at least—but not only—in the Netherlands, dates back to a 19th century emancipatory movement in language education that wanted schools to pay attention to the “real” language of the students, referred to as their mother tongue, instead of solely to the official, written standard variety that made children from lower socioeconomic classes and dialect speakers fail in schools (see e.g. van den Bosch, 1893; van Ginneken, 1917). However, in view of the increasingly multilingual character of contemporary societies and schools that resulted from migration and mobility, this name became less adequate over the years (Kroon, 1985; 2003). As a matter of fact, mother tongue education took on board novel and different meanings—such as referring to teaching the language of immigrant students’ countries of origin in complementary schools. At the same time, in mainstream schools, the distinction was introduced between either teaching the language of the host country as a first language (L1) or as a second language (L2), as well as various forms of multilingual education. IMEN was fully aware of such distinctions and theorizing the concept of ‘mother tongue’, it distinguished between mother tongue from a historical-linguistic perspective (i.e., an ‘original’ language from which other languages spring), a socialization perspective (i.e., the language informally ‘taught’ in primary socialization), a political-sociocultural perspective (i.e., the language connected with the nation-state), and a socio-educational perspective (i.e., language as a subject, a carrier of knowledge, a medium of instruction and of identity construction). In its research program, however, the acronym MTE was maintained as a common denominator of the school subject under investigation whereas at the same time the phrase ‘standard language and/or mother tongue education’ was used (see e.g., Gagné, Daems, Kroon & Sturm, 1987).

Along the same line of thought, in their paper *Understanding the (Post-)National L1 Subjects: Three Problematics*, Green and Erixon (2020) have extensively dealt with the current curricular position of what they call L1 education, i.e., “education in the national language—the official standard language of particular national states (...) and teaching national culture as well (...) in the same subject-area” (p.259). Since we agree with Green and Erixon’s reasoning and suggestion, in this special issue we will preferably use L1 education instead of MTE thus leading to L1 German, L1 Dutch, L1 French education, etc. At the same time, for historical reasons mainly, it will be unavoidable to at times also use *mother tongue education*.

4. IMEN’S RESEARCH PROGRAM

IMEN’s first aim, documenting L1 education in Europe, was materialized by publishing *A Survey of Standard Language Teaching in Nine European Countries* and an accompanying *Annotated Bibliography* (Herrlitz et al., 1984a; 1984b). These country reports were written by L1 education specialists participating in IMEN, based on four

central questions that had been prepared by the IMEN Steering Committee. These questions ran as follows (Herrlitz & Peterse, 1984, pp. 19-20):

- 1) Which was the dominant paradigm of mother tongue teaching around 1970? This first question included six sub questions dealing with (1.1) objectives, content and teaching-learning concepts of the paradigm, (1.2) the position of the paradigm in different types of education or age-groups, (1.3) institutional support for the paradigm, (1.4) what is the paradigm's historical background and how is related to societal developments, (1.5) which political structures sustain the paradigm, (1.6) official regulations regarding examinations, teaching programs, curricula, teacher qualifications, and provisions.
- 2) Were there any competing paradigms of mother tongue education around 1970? What was the position of competing paradigms, a. on a theoretical level, and b. in the day-to-day school practice? Can you characterize these competing paradigms [as in 1]?
- 3) How could the development of competing paradigms of mother tongue education until 1982 be characterized or described? Which conditions have either stimulated or made these developments possible?
- 4) How do you assess individual developments? Which paradigm of mother tongue education in your country do you consider promising for the further development of mother tongue education as a subject and why?

The resulting country reports, covering Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, England, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Turkey—and in a second survey also Norway, Sweden, the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria (Delnoy, Herrlitz & Kroon, 1995)—mainly dealt with what was then called the rhetoric of the field as could be found in relevant documents. The first series of country reports was discussed at the first 1983 IMEN conference in Veldhoven, the Netherlands. There it was decided to engage, as a next step in the IMEN research program, in conducting a series of international comparative research projects dealing with actual classroom practices of L1 education in Europe.

A first project dealt with teacher diaries as a starting point for comparative research in L1 education. These diaries were written by teachers and were then used and interpreted by IMEN researchers to draw *Portraits in Mother Tongue Education* based on the following guidelines (see Kroon & Sturm, 1988, p. 10):

- 1) Ask a mother tongue teacher that you know to keep a 'diary' of twelve lessons that s/he teaches in the period January/February 1985.
- 2) Discuss that diary with the teacher involved and ask in particular for clarification of the subject matter that is dealt with in those lessons; together with that teacher, try to answer the question: 'What is really happening?'

- 3) Make a document of the diary and the results of the discussion which can be used at the 1986 IMEN Conference.

The portraits that resulted from this exercise included Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, England, Hungary, the Netherlands, Turkey, France, and Italy (see Delnoy et al., 1988). They were comparatively discussed at the second 1986 IMEN Conference in Antwerp, Belgium. At the Antwerp conference it was decided to take still another step and engage in collaborative classroom case studies into specific aspects of L1 education such as literature, grammar, multilingualism, and writing: from investigating the rhetoric of L1 education through document analysis, via investigating reported classroom practices in the portraits study, to investigating real life classroom practices as observed through (participant) observation in empirical interpretive case studies. The guidelines for these case studies stipulated the following aspects:

- 1) Case studies should be conducted by participant observers who document and interpret the various aspects of the case.
- 2) Documentation and interpretation should account for different viewpoints and perspectives: teacher and learner, rhetoric and practice, innovation and tradition.
- 3) More than one dimension of data collection and interpretation should be included: relate data from various sources and interpretations from various perspectives.
- 4) The case studies must be comparative in the sense that in the process of interpretation, the judgements of a specialist from outside the culture in question must be included.

Each of these guidelines was explained in detail to ensure comparability of the collected data, analyses, and interpretations. The results of a first round of international comparative case studies focusing on a variety of L1 education issues were discussed at the third 1990 IMEN Conference in Ludwigsburg, Germany (Delnoy, Haueis & Kroon, 1992; see also Haueis & Herrlitz, 1991). The countries that (in different compositions) participated in the case studies included Belgium-Flanders, the Netherlands, Italy, England, Hungary, Sweden, and Denmark. After the conference, collaboration continued, and discussions and comparisons were mainly organized through smaller international meetings and workshops the results of which were mainly published in the IMEN series *Occasional Papers in Mother Tongue Education* (see Kroon, 2007, for an overview).

A second round of international comparative case studies focused on homogenization and heterogeneity in L1 education under the heading of 'multilingual children in monolingual schools'. The guidelines for these case studies were the same as in 1990 but now the sole focus was on (the consequences of) linguistic diversity in standard language teaching. The countries involved were Belgium-Flanders, England,

Germany, and the Netherlands and later also Russia, i.e., the city of Moscow and the Russian Federation Republics of Altai and Bashkortostan. The results of these case studies were discussed at the 1995 international IMEN-FABER Conference in Hamburg, Germany (Gogolin & Kroon, 2000) and the 1997 IMEN-INPO Conference in Moscow (Kroon & Khruslov, 1998).

5. METHODOLOGY

The IMEN research program and its methodology were inspired by two developments. First, the then upcoming employment of ethnographic methods in educational research (e.g., Hammersley, 1983; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) as part of what Rist (1980) called 'Blitzkrieg Ethnography', leading to a number of influential school ethnographies such as Willis (1979), Woods (1979), Ball (1981), and Lightfoot (1983). Second, the growing criticism in the same period regarding large-scale cross-national surveys of educational outcomes as conducted by, for example, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement leading to what Crossley and Vulliamy (1984, p. 196) called an 'administrative science of education' and the alternative of also introducing ethnographic methods in comparative education as in for example the studies collected in Spindler and Spindler (1987) (see Sturm, 1987 and 1991, for an extensive discussion).

IMEN research was mainly conducted in the form of collaborative case study projects, i.e., researchers from a limited number of countries engaging in a joint project, focusing on a specific aspect of L1 education, and employing an empirical-interpretive comparative research methodology. The development of this methodology consisted of four steps: (1) developing types of collaboration, (2) developing a theoretical framework for comparative analysis, (3) developing a method for analysis of case study data, and (4) developing a method for international triangulation.

5.1 Developing types of collaboration

Two main types of international collaboration were developed, i.e., the 'help model' and the 'cooperation model'. In the 'help model' a single case study is conducted in a country by researchers from that country, whereas in the 'cooperation model', comparative case studies on the same topic are conducted in several countries at the same time by researchers from these countries. In both models, researchers from other countries can be involved as researchers who in person are fully involved in the case study (full participation), as researchers who participate in the case study by attending workshops dealing with its data analysis and interpretation (advisory participation), or as researchers who participate in the case study only through written contributions (correspondence participation). The main research tool that was used in these collaborative processes was international triangulation (see below).

5.2 Developing a theoretical framework for comparative analysis

In a first attempt to develop a theoretical framework for comparative analysis, following Bernstein (1971), IMEN focused on fields and boundaries of L1 education, trying to answer the following question, formulated by Herrlitz (2007, p. 45): “In which learning fields are the lessons of standard language education of a particular country divided, and how strong are the boundaries between the separate fields.” The countries under comparison turned out to show differences regarding the existence of strong and weak boundaries between L1 education and other school subjects, strong and weak relations between different fields of L1 education, and strong or weak definitions of what contents are included (or not) in L1 education. More concretely, to give a few examples, it turned out:

that certain components of the lessons evidently play quite different roles in the standard language in different countries; while, for example, in Germany the teaching of German in secondary education is clearly dominated by the component Literature (“Literaturbetrachtung”), the development of the linguistic abilities and skills plays a central role in the Netherlands (“taalbeheersing”); while in the standard language teaching of France five components are visible (spelling, texts, grammar, letter [writing], reading), standard language education in Hungary is composed out of the two fields Language and Literature. (Herrlitz, 2007, p. 45)

According to Bernstein (1971) the boundary strength between the different fields of knowledge bound to a school subject, gives information about the type of knowledge construction in a curriculum: if the boundaries are strong, the curriculum is additive, rigidly defining separate fields of knowledge; if the boundaries are weak, the curriculum is integrative and tries to connect many fields of knowledge. In the above example:

Hungary and France show affinity to a more additive type, whereas the Netherlands and Germany, on the contrary, have affinity with a more integrative type, at least with respect to the internal structure of the mother tongue education; externally, with respect to other subjects, border strength in all four cases is high. (Herrlitz, 2007, p. 47)

A second attempt in developing a theoretical framework for comparative analysis focused on analyzing the patterns of interaction that constitute the teaching-learning processes in L1 education. Following Mehan’s (1979) approach, in different countries and fields of L1 education, different interaction patterns were found, such as for example a *structuring-reacting-evaluating* (S-R-E) pattern constituting a corrective cycle in a grammar lesson in Belgium-Flanders vs. a structuring-reacting-reinforcing/reformulating pattern in a literature lesson in Hungary where the evaluative turn has lost its corrective function, constituting additive interaction cycles. Also, interaction patterns were found that did not show the classic S-R-E pattern but consisted of adjacency pairs like *suggestion-reaction* and *question-answer* in students’ group discussions. A comparison of the different turn-taking structures shows,

that they differ characteristically with respect to the evaluative turn; this might indicate a different degree of discipline, implying a varying influence of the collective vs. the

integrative educational code on standard language teaching in particular European countries. (Herrlitz, 1990, p. 14-15)

5.3 Developing a method for the analysis of case study data

A first concept that IMEN used for the analysis of classroom case study data was the professional practical knowledge of teachers, defined by Anderson-Levitt (1978, p. 173) as their:

savoir faire or 'know-how': *neither what they think nor what they do, but what they think as they are doing what they do*. Knowledge, then, is a shorthand term for beliefs, values, expectations, mental-models and formulas for doing things which the teachers use in interpreting and generating classroom events. [italics in original]

To find out what really happened in L1 education classrooms in European countries, IMEN case studies focused on analyzing teachers' practical professional knowledge through observing classroom practices and interviewing teachers. In doing so (hidden) concepts determining the construction of learning content and the construction of teaching-learning processes, as well as more general principles of language education underlying the above concepts could be isolated and compared.

The professional practical knowledge of teachers (and students) resembles, as Herrlitz (2007) put it, the structure of an iceberg: above the waterline only the top of the iceberg is visible—for example one single orthography problem dealt with on the blackboard—whereas beneath the surface,

the real mountain of spelling problems, teaching phases, interaction patterns etc. is hidden, which structures the totality of the related educational practice. [...] In this type of standard language education, the practical pedagogical knowledge [...] has the structure of a *metonymy*. In this metonymy a *part* [a specific spelling problem] represents the *whole*—the educational problem and all related elements of its pedagogical solution." [...] The metonymies of professional practical knowledge which structure the practice of standard language teaching must be seen as cultural models, which have been developed in a long educational and institutional tradition. (Herrlitz, 2007, pp. 56-57)

As such these concepts are key to understanding and comparing L1 education practices across different countries thus playing a central role in the key analysis approach that IMEN developed for analyzing its case study data (see Kroon & Sturm, 2007) where these case study contained one or more key event(s). According to Erickson (1986, p. 108):

A key event is key in that the researcher assumes intuitively that the event chosen has the potential to make explicit a theoretical "loading". A key event is key in that it brings to awareness latent, intuitive judgments the analyst has already made about salient patterns in the data. Once brought to awareness these judgments can be reflected upon critically.

In an earlier article, Erickson (1977, p. 61) states:

I think what qualitative research does best and most essentially is to describe key incidents in functionally relevant descriptive terms and place them in some relation to the wider social context, using the key incident as a concrete instance of the workings of

abstract principles of social organisation. [...] The qualitative researcher's ability to pull out from field notes a key incident, link it to other incidents, phenomena, and theoretical constructs, and write it up so others can see the generic in the particular, the universal in the concrete, the relation between part and whole (...) may be the most important thing he does.

The step from an ethnographic database of classroom practices, consisting of observations, fieldnotes, audio/video recordings, and transcripts of teacher and student interviews, to key incident analysis is not self-evident. It requires (at least) the following steps:

- 1) Making a synopsis of the observed classroom practice based on classroom observations and, where relevant, references to documents, fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and recordings
- 2) Joint reading and discussing the synopsis in relation to the "sensitizing concepts", i.e., starting points in thinking about a class of data mainly based on existing knowledge (van den Hoonaard, 1997, p. 2), looking for events that potentially qualify as key incidents for further analysis.
- 3) Transcribing possible key incidents and final selection of key incidents to be analyzed
- 4) Construction of the final form of the key incidents by leaving out irrelevant exchanges in such a way that the key incident becomes accessible for analysis and interpretation.
- 5) Analysis and interpretation of selected key incidents.
- 6) Comparison of key incident analyses within the same data base.
- 7) Comparison of key incident analyses in international comparative case studies through international triangulation.

IMEN-related classroom ethnographies that use key incident analysis are among others Bezemer (2003), Spotti (2007; 2011), Gogolin & Kroon (2000), and Loevenich (2022).

5.4 Developing a method for international triangulation

To be able to carry out comparative empirical interpretive ethnographic research into L1 education in classrooms throughout Europe, IMEN developed the research method of international triangulation (Herrlitz & Sturm, 1991; Kroon & Sturm, 2007). Different types of triangulations already were used when IMEN was facing the problem of how to engage researchers from different countries in analyzing and interpreting their joint classroom data. In Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, data, theory, participant, and researcher triangulation are dealt with. International triangulation, as a form of researcher triangulation, is defined by Herrlitz and Sturm (1991, p. 10) as

a research strategy by which researchers attempt to accumulate as many perspectives on their cases under study as they can handle in all fairness, being not afraid of perspectives which 'make the familiar strange', in order to implement a process of meaning construction that allows for dealing with convergencies, inconsistencies and contradictions.

This is done through what Woods (1986, p. 163) called "dialogue-testing-dialogue" routines in which the 'testing' stage refers to discursive and observational activities mainly that can be used for finding out if the proposed data, analyses, or interpretations make sense from an outsider perspective, i.e., from the point of view of the researcher from abroad. For applying an international triangulation procedure in IMEN case studies, the following steps were proposed to the (international) teams of IMEN researchers each consisting of members from two or more countries (following Kroon & Sturm, 2007, pp. 114-115):

- 1) The 'native' researcher (or research team) collects case study data in an L1 education classroom in their own country.
- 2) The 'native' researcher organizes the data into descriptive events, incidents, portraits, and reconstructed realities.
- 3) The 'native' researcher writes a first draft memo in which they analyze, conceptualize, and interpret the descriptive events etc. from an insider perspective.
- 4) The 'native' researcher circulates the descriptive events and the accompanying memo among the participating researcher (or research team) from abroad.
- 5) The researcher from abroad writes a memo in which they analyze, conceptualize, and interpret the circulated events etc. from an outsider perspective.
- 6) The researcher from abroad writes a memo in which they formulate critical questions to the 'native' researcher's memo, especially trying to speculate whether different interpretations might be related to the different cultures involved.
- 7) Team meeting of 'native' researchers and researchers from abroad in which the memos are discussed, different interpretations are listed, speculations are made regarding their backgrounds, and appointments are made for testing the interpretations and speculations at the research site.
- 8) The team members engage in testing interpretations and speculations at the research site and write memos on the testing results (as in steps 3, 4 and 6).
- 9) Team meeting of 'native' researchers and researchers from abroad in which the memos are discussed (as in step 7) and decisions are made to leave the dialogue-testing-dialogue process.
- 10) The 'native' researchers and the researchers from abroad jointly write a memo with a comparative analysis using the differences and similarities discovered and tested in the international triangulation procedure.

Examples of the memos referred to in the above steps can be found in Delnoy, Haueis & Kroon (1992). This edited volume is a report of the 1990 IMEN Conference

in Ludwigsburg, Germany, that explicitly dealt with comparative analyses of IMEN case studies. The book contains preparatory guidelines and documents for comparative analysis, examples of comparative analysis that were conducted at the conference, and reflections on comparative analysis that were formulated after the conference.

6. CHANGING TIMES

One of IMEN's main characteristics at its early stage was its mainly being based on researchers' willingness to use their institutional research time—and free time as a matter of fact—to contribute to the network and its research program and to engage in project acquisition when and wherever possible, without really feeling the need to engage in peer reviewed publishing and acquiring high scores on citation indexes that gradually became common practice in academia. Although this way of working has initially been rather successful, in the end it turned out that the 'slow science' (Van der Aa & Blommaert, 2017, p. 259) the network was propagating—without in fact using this term—made it vulnerable in a scientific environment where individual researchers could no longer escape from peer reviewed publishing and participating in research grant competition, and where having focused international collaborative workshops without stunning outcomes and impressive peer-reviewed papers was increasingly considered an unaffordable luxury (see also Blommaert, 2020).

Consequently, at the turn of the century, IMEN participants became less and less involved in the rather anarchistic and horizontally organized research community that IMEN was and gradually stopped participating. Meanwhile some of those who took the initiative in the 1980s passed away, others retired, and no new initiatives have been taken. Instead of keeping IMEN in a kind of eternal coma, the still existing yet mainly "sleeping" Steering Committee decided to formally end the institutional network by way of organizing a final expert meeting. Honoring the tradition of IMEN this meeting was filled with presentations, i.e., country reports that were partly circulated beforehand, focusing on some of the 'new' challenges, L1 education is currently facing, and on comparative discussions and international triangulation in response to these reports.

We are living in an era of globalization, digitalization, and super-diversity. Ongoing globalization processes characterized by fast-paced mobility and migratory flows have turned the diversity that was already present during IMEN's early days into an even more scattered form of diversity where side-to-side and sometimes back-to-back relations of relatively bounded entities have become reverberative criss-crossings of national, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic affiliations that are not easy to presuppose (see Vertovec, 2007; Parkin, 2012). Apart from people and goods, languages and cultures are crossing borders too, thereby rendering urban and non-urban spaces into novel super-diverse environments whose societal groupings and institutions see the emergence of discursive genres, along with new linguistic and cultural practices and identities (Spotti & Blommaert, 2017). These processes are not only at

work in situations where people engage in oral as well as written communication offline but also in socio-technological platforms online and thus at the online-offline nexus that derives from it (Szabla, 2022; Spotti & Blommaert, 2023).

Education is no exception to this. Rather, it is one of the main environments where globalization and digitalization become manifest. This is visible in the superdiverse nature of the schools' student bodies, in the sociolinguistic and ethnocultural doings these students bring along with them as well as in the increasingly digitalized modes of teaching and learning they are exposed to and have become acquainted with. All these elements, in one way or another, have an impact on regular teaching-learning processes in mainstream education and beyond (Spotti & Kroon, 2016; 2020). In addition, the variety of digital media resources, used to organize education and shape new (online) didactic and pedagogical forms of teaching and learning—even more so under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic—must be mentioned here as a characteristic of contemporary education.

A final aspect that globalization and digitalization contributed to education is a rethinking of traditional curricula in terms of their relevance and viability for future generations of students who have to be prepared for the superdiverse digital environment that can be considered their natural habitat and in which notions like national identity and mother tongue are in a process of being contested by some and being rediscovered and applauded by others. Green and Erixon (2020) consider the relationship between education, language, and nation to be “unfinished business” (p. 262) that needs to be rearticulated in a global perspective. It is exactly at the nexus of L1 education as it has been put into practice since the invention of printing and the introduction of vernacular languages as a medium of instruction and a school subject on the one hand, and L1 education in globalized mainstream schools that prepare students for participating in a digitalized superdiverse society on the other, that the 2022 final IMEN expert meeting was situated and that participants were asked to focus on in their contributions.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS

This special issue, apart from this introduction and an afterword, has five invited contributions from countries that have participated in IMEN (almost) from its beginning as a network, i.e., Belgium-Flanders, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and for an outsider perspective Australia—a country that became involved in IMEN much later down the line (see e.g., Doecke & van de Ven, 2012).

Although the IMEN research program mainly focused on teachers' professional practical knowledge in contemporary classroom practices in L1 education, it had its starting point in historical surveys of L1 education in seventeen European countries (Herrlitz et al., 1984; Delnoy, Herrlitz & Kroon, 1995). This historical perspective turned out to be important for formulating sensitizing concepts for a comparative analysis of L1 classroom practices in different countries, i.e., cultures.

In his contribution on ‘old problems and new challenges’ for L1 education, Eduard Haueis (Germany) identifies contemporary challenges to German L1 education and German L1 teacher education and traces them back to the historically important difference between the German *Volksschule*, initially focusing on ‘mother tongue, i.e., vernacular, monolingual education for the lower classes and Latin or scholarly (grammar) schools focusing on multilingual education preparing for academic careers. He claims that what was developed in the last third of the 20th century in the context of a scientific foundation for the didactics of L1 German has since fallen into oblivion. He argues that a theoretical foundation is needed to make L1 education part of the professional practical knowledge of teachers and roughly sketches some contours of such foundation with special attention to the challenges posed by the multilingual character of contemporary societies and schools as a consequence of international mobility and migration processes.

Sigmund Ongstad (Norway) too, takes a historical perspective. He sketches the epistemological history of L1 education—from a prime literalization of the population in the 18th century to the contemporary school subject Norwegian—and the accompanying institutionalization of L1-didactics from a Norwegian and partly Scandinavian perspective. He contends that the achieved disciplinary state of L1 didactics and even Norwegian as a subject might be challenged or even get lost due to the increasing prevalence of international literacy and English as a global academic discourse. Against this backdrop, Ongstad discusses four processes that in his perspective play a decisive role in this development: literacification (i.e., the promotion of literacy as a universal epistemology leading to a focus on skills and competencies in the curriculum), internationalization (i.e., any import and application of basic educational ideas, ideologies, discourses, policies, and means from abroad), disciplinarization (i.e., the tendency to professionalize, institutionalize, and formalize school subjects and university disciplines), and didactization (i.e., how teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and authorities transform, adapt, and contextualize knowledge and skills for learners and learning). Ongstad argues that didactization develops into disciplinarization, that literacification is fused by internationalization, and that didactization and literacification seemingly pull L1 education both in the same and opposite directions, leading to an opposition of *Bildung*-oriented L1 didactics and competence base literacy, ultimately leading to the question whether traditional L1 disciplinarity will survive.

John Yandell and John Hardcastle (England) present an almost classical IMEN case study in an L1 education classroom in a London school, observed through the eyes of two student teachers who as part of their pre-service teacher education program are asked to write about a lesson they have observed—in this case a lesson about the novel *In the sea there are no crocodiles* by Fabio Geda, taught by two different teachers. Yandel and Hardcastle use the student-teachers’ accounts to explore differences in pedagogy and in the versions of English that are instantiated in the lessons, what they, following Paolo Freire, call ‘a banking model of education’ vs ‘participating in a struggle over meaning’. They do so against the backdrop of a concise

history of English teaching and teacher education in which they critically engage with Stephen Ball's (1984) contribution to the first IMEN-survey of standard language teaching in Europe. Yandel and Hardcastle claim that these forms of practice bear family resemblances to many other lessons and have complex histories that can only be understood by looking at the ways in which they relate to the view of the subject that dominates the landscape of policy in England today.

Where most of the contributions focus on aspects of language and literacy teaching, there are also two contributions that deal with literature as part of the L1 curriculum. Maria Löfgren and Per-Olaf Erixon (Sweden) focus on the role of literature didactics in a large-scale Swedish, professional development program for teachers in L1 education, called the *Reading Lift*. The program was introduced in reaction to the finding of steadily declining literacy results in PISA and PIRLS studies, and an overall decline in youth's reading habits. It aimed to provide teachers with knowledge of children's and youth literature, as well as literary didactic methods. Löfgren and Erixon examine the literary didactics represented in the program and its relationship with literacy and digitalization. They find a strong dominance of strategy-based information-oriented approaches in which literature didactics becomes a manual, and the teacher a service person. They claim that the marginalization of literature in L1 education and the predominance of a systematic and strategy-oriented literacy skills approach, rather than only being a result of its adaption to global educational assessment discourses, also must be understood against the background of the new (hyper)media culture and discuss both the potential and limits of literature didactics for L1 education.

Also van Keulen and Spotti (the Netherlands) focus on (historical) Dutch literature education. They first discuss the development, in an educational design research project, of a digital educational game aimed at engaging students in the top segment of the Dutch higher secondary education sector in 'reasoning' about and with historical literature. In the project, a series of game-, content-, and literature didactics-related design principles have been developed to build, implement, and evaluate first an analogue version of the game, after that a hybrid version with a combination of analogue and digital elements, and finally a fully digitalized version of the former. In addition to its evaluation within the framework of the educational design research study, the implementation of the digitalized version of the game was also investigated in an ethnographic case study. Van Keulen and Spotti show that this game-based software leads to a (slightly) higher motivation for engaging with literature and an improvement of the literary reasoning capabilities on the part of the students. At the same time, the case study also shows that this technologically gauged game-based mode of approaching historical literature is perceived by many of the students as a one-way pathway where the hermeneutic experience of reading and interpreting a character's doings is reduced to the bare minimum by online technologies expectations and demands.

One of the main foci in IMEN's comparative analysis of classroom discourse was analyzing the patterns of interaction that constitute the teaching-learning processes

in L1 education. Starting from the sociocultural idea that knowledge is co-constructed by students, and that exploratory talk can support them to develop higher-order thinking, high-level understanding, the voicing of personal opinions and ideas, and argumentation skills, Jan T'Sas and Frans Daems (Belgium-Flanders) highlight the relevance of exploratory talk and associated challenges for L1 education in a globalized, digitalized, and superdiverse context. They argue that exploratory talk can meet these challenges, but its potential can only be realized fully by a shift towards dialogic teaching as opposed to the traditional IRF/IRE-interaction pattern which still dominates classroom practice.

Brenton Doecke, Graham Parr and Ceridwen Owen (Australia) present a collaborative inquiry into the professional practice of an L1 teacher (who is at the same time a co-author). They do so to explore the potential of IMEN-protocols to render the familiar strange and to see the teacher's practice with new eyes. The inquiry is mainly connected to the ongoing standards-based curriculum reforms in Australia that typically foreground the importance of a particular form of English and standardized formulations of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, which facilitate easy measurement and comparisons between educational settings at local, national, and international levels. They argue that the pressures of these reforms have intensified to such an extent that traditional framings of L1 English teacher practice, which emphasize responsiveness to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students, begin to look like a discourse of a bygone era. They further explore whether the IMEN legacy provides intellectual resources to resist the relentless pressures towards standardization and measurement that are radically re-shaping the praxis of English educators in Australia.

8. OUTLOOK

We expect these contributions and this special issue as a whole to be a strong argument for setting forth an ongoing yet renewed interest in international comparative discussion on and around L1 education and a plea to further collaborative research from an empirical-interpretive ethnographic perspective on teachers' professional practical knowledge and classroom practices so to contribute to building a dam against international evaluation and assessment studies that present comparative data on L1 education, more specifically its declining results, without shedding any light on the classroom practices in which the languages under discussion are taught and learnt. We are convinced that empirical-interpretive studies in and of L1 education practices (Greem & Bloome, 1997) can either provide support or even an alternative for the current international assessment movement that is increasingly criticized, as for example by Zhao (2020, p. 245), with respect to "its underlying view of education, its implementation, and its interpretation and impact on education globally." Concrete classroom practices, reflecting teachers' professional practical knowledge, rather than limited national rhetoric or international testing regimes, in our opinion, should guide our understanding and making changes in the ubiquitous

international school subject L1 education that aims at preparing students for a global, digital, and super-diverse society.

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