

Making Meaning in a Multilingual Context

Abstract

The development of TEO - an oral word processor allowing for autonomous, collaborative, reflective and authentic language learning - results from the analysis of Luxembourg's sociocultural context where the simultaneous use of several languages is prevailing. TEO has been implemented in many preschool and primary classrooms.

The construction of stories mediated by the use of TEO results in creating a complexity and connectedness in language learning which is all too often lacking in the classrooms where discrete items and/or skills monopolize a large part of the schedule.

TEO is a major constituent of the narrative framework for a meaningful elaboration of oral language skills and for communication and expression of children's deeper concerns.

Multilingualism in Luxembourg

With around 412.000 inhabitants and an area of 2.586 square kilometres, Luxembourg is the smallest country in the European Union. Its citizens actually experience «borders as sites where identities and cultures intersect». [Rosaldo, 1993, p. 149] Thirty three per cent of the population being of foreign descent with the number of immigrant children about a third of the total population of pre-school and primary classrooms, Luxembourg is characterised by its multiculturalism and multilingualism. The three official languages are Luxembourgish, German and French.

Luxembourgish citizens are living in multilingual contexts with changing configurations of interdependent languages and cultures. The simultaneous use and the relative equality status of the different languages are salient features of Luxembourg's sociocultural context.

Hence language learning takes over a considerable part of the school curriculum: at least forty per cent of the hours available for teaching in any grade are dedicated to language learning (German, French and Luxembourgish); the proportion of language teaching remains considerable in secondary education and vocational training. Curriculum subjects and contents are traditionally taught either in German or in French, Luxembourgish not necessarily being considered as the common language in the classroom.

However educational settings in Luxembourg do not allow for the simultaneous use and the equality of status of all the languages spoken and written by the pupils. Thus, it is not considered that in a context where literacy in two or more languages is fostered simultaneously «labels such as native language or second language learners lose their meaning and may lead to misleading assumptions about children's learning, usually involving a required set or sequences of skills.» [Luis C. Moll & Joel D. Dworin, 1996, p. 241]

TEO - a tool for making meaning in a multilingual context

The idea of respecting children's experience of the simultaneous use of several languages in Luxembourg's sociocultural context led to the questioning of the practice of separately teaching the different languages and to the subsequent development of TEO (Text Editor Oral) - a tool for making meaning in a multilingual context through storying. TEO stimulates and promotes language learning as a collaborative process to which children can bring their own particular language competences in speaking. This is particularly important in Luxembourg's primary classrooms where pupils often lose confidence as they are confronted with a language that is not their mother tongue or close to it in a sequence which typically moves from the teaching of Luxembourgish in preschool to that of German in the first grade and to that of French in the second grade.

In contrast, enabling the children to create stories with TEO offers many possibilities for autonomous, active and exploratory language learning in any target language while respecting the native language skills of all children. Also, by using TEO throughout the curriculum, children's strengths and weaknesses can be balanced, as for instance portuguese children with competences in oral French can assist Luxembourgish children who themselves might help their partners when it comes to create stories in German.

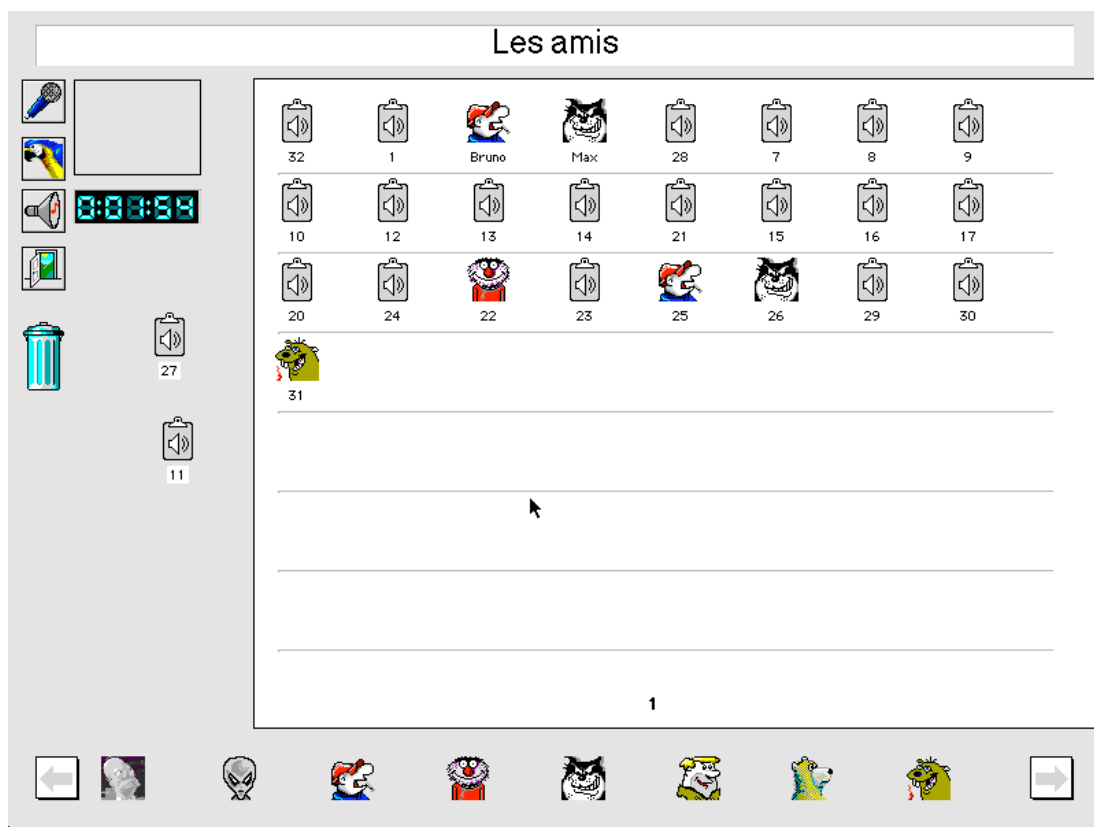
Let us just keep in mind that when working with TEO French could be for some children a first, a second, a third or even a fourth language. French as a fourth language could be the case for an English pupil in the Luxembourgish school system. English would be his first language. Luxembourgish would be his second language in the kindergarten. German in the first grade would be his third language and French in the second grade would then be his fourth language to be learned. Building on children's multiple language and meta-language competences is a major component of the work with TEO and it should be an asset of effective second language teaching and learning in any setting.

TEO in Use

TEO is a highly versatile oral word processor which encourages the development of oral expression skills in both native and foreign languages.

Due to the demands of busy teaching schedules and managing the classroom and also to the difficulties inherent in assessing progress, oral expression is often neglected in school. It is important to note that TEO is particularly implemented in classrooms where pupils are from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The computer gives them a greater sense of freedom in creating an authentic learning experience.

TEO offers an attractive, user-friendly environment for oral expression through story building in class, and is easily accessible even to children and teachers who have had little experience with information technologies. The user interface is presented in the form of a blank page similar to that used in word processing programmes with a traditional but simplified menu bar at the top of the screen with a tool bar on the left. Pupils work at the computer in small groups of two or three children, taking turns to input their sentences, but individual work is possible as well. This work can be performed in the classroom but in order to promote autonomy teachers are advised to let this work happen in a room adjacent to the classroom. Some teachers incorporated older pupils from other grades as well as members of the local community when having their pupils work with TEO.



The children click first on the microphone to start the recording process. A neutral icon is displayed representing the recorded text. These icons are numbered consecutively as they are placed on the page one at a time to 'contain' the users recorded text. It is possible to attach small printed texts to the icons. In this case the text will replace the number. Unsurprisingly this feature is not widely used by the speakers as it seems to interfere too much with the dynamics of oral discourse. Icons can be placed on the desktop or be disposed of immediately in the big trash bin. A second click deactivates the microphone and the computer repeats the recorded speech so that the children have immediate feedback on the quality of their production. This function can also be switched off in the case it is not needed as for an interview, for example. The total time of the recordings is given. At the bottom of the screen there is a selection of icons which children are free to place onto the neutral icons, in order to highlight particular parts of the discourse, for instance. It is possible for the children to add new icons to the icons library. During and after recording, the story can be edited by deleting, re-arranging or re-recording icons.

TEO shows the remarkable power of this medium not only to encourage children to engage in authentic learning trying out new language they have heard or found in a dictionary, but also expressing their most secret desires, fears and taboos in stories that they proudly present in class once their project is completed.

TEO is a particularly valid learning and assessment tool in that it 'captures' speech graphically and compactly, enabling teachers to keep records of children's progress by comparing new examples with earlier work. The children themselves become more aware of their own production and begin to permanently assess it, thereby

becoming actively involved in the learning process and, at the same time, developing listening skills. Like word-processing, oral text processing plays an important role in the psychological development process as it allows children to dissect their own utterances, rearranging, deleting and adding as desired. In this way it enables the child to develop another, more abstract, form of thinking, disconnected from direct experience. Access to and development of this mode of 'decentred' or 'disembedded' thinking is indispensable both in aiding a child to express him/herself coherently in public, and in developing the higher cognitive skills needed if he or she is to cope with the school programme or, indeed, life outside the school.

An inherent advantage in the use of TEO, particularly in a multicultural country such as Luxembourg where children come from very different backgrounds, is that children work in groups around the computer, each using and integrating their own linguistic competences which differ largely from child to child. Those with greater capacities help their peers to reach a higher level by enabling them to bridge the gap between what they are capable of doing alone and what they can achieve with the assistance of others more knowledgeable or skilled than themselves. Obviously, this factor comes into play in all group interactions, but here TEO serves as a creative medium which encourages and facilitates exchanges, particularly for children who have difficulties in expressing themselves orally in broader classroom situations.

According to the language learning situation it will be most profitable to take advantage of the particular strengths and competences of the children involved. Some children can act out their competencies in a field where children speaking another first or second language will have but limited understanding. Such a constellation appears to be a fertile ground for meta-linguistic awareness and knowledge to be explored and developed in collaborative language learning. Children seem to be well aware of the opportunities for collaborative knowledge building offered by a curriculum where most of the languages spoken by one or another category of pupils figure as a compulsory subject matter.

The idea for the development of TEO grew out of a project in writing designed as a writer's workshop.

In a second grade children were writing their own texts in German in order to be published in a classroom newspaper to be distributed in the local community. Texts were read to members of the class during a writer's conference, changed subsequently and edited, first in pairs between pupils of differing competences and ultimately with the teacher, before publishing. During this project we noticed how intimately all the languages present in Luxembourgish classrooms interrelate when it comes to engage in language processes, be it talking, reading or writing. Children's languages are not confined to the narrow territories of curriculum domains but emerge every time pupils want to exchange ideas. Even the separation between talking and writing, between oracy and literacy seemed to be an artificial one. Eventually the children fell back on oral exchanges whenever they felt the need for making sense of written products. On the other hand, even the possibility offered by TEO to store ephemeral oral productions cannot prevent children from elaborating on their stories by writing down at least parts of the script to follow.

The experience with the writer's workshop showed so much authentic communication with and around the autonomous and collaborative process of writing

that we thought of designing TEO as a software allowing for the same amount of dynamic communication to appear during oral productions.

Evaluation of TEO

In order to evaluate the use of TEO we conducted semi-structured interviews with pupils of all the classrooms involved. The questions focused on storying, reading, writing, media, speaking, listening, collaboration, IT and the use of TEO. Details can be found in the final report mentioned below.

Children seem to be aware of the dynamic and varied communication patterns that can be put to use in Luxembourg's multilingual environment.

When asked: "Do you think that it is difficult to tell a story in a language different than your first language?", an 8 year old boy replied:

"I spent five years in France before entering school; my mother was working and I spent my days with the child of the lady employer or with friends; my cousin taught me German; on entering secondary school I will take up English because I am already knowledgeable about German and about French."

An 8 year old girl replied:

"With foreign people it is easy to learn their language."

In this context it may be interesting to note that just about 55% of the second grade children interviewed (N=126) admitted difficulties in telling a story in a language different from their first language.

Such a finding contrasts sharply with opinions held by most Luxembourgish teachers who think that, depending on the grades, they will have to begin "foreign" language teaching of Luxembourgish, German or French from scratch. Most of the time teachers consider that children are not capable of taking advantage of the many language clues (signs, texts, peers' knowledge of the language, ...) figuring prominently in the sociocultural context in Luxembourg. Teachers tend to think and to believe that listening skills should be developed before oral skills come into play. The latter in their turn will pave the way for the introducing of writing. This view is underpinned by the current national curriculum steeped in speech act theory.

However the latter's pragmatic orientation gives easily way to a structuralist teaching of writing (grammar and orthography) at the cost of oral skills because language teaching provides for early selection and promotion of the pupils.

However, in my opinion Luxembourg's multilingual situation can constitute an ideal ground for a global learning environment building on the existing and diverse language skills (speaking, writing, reading in different languages) which children have developed before entering school and which they will continuously develop after. The official school system and the sociocultural context seem to diverge disproportionately in respect to the actual use and distribution of languages in Luxembourg.

In working with TEO we have tried to create conditions enabling the pupils to make use of all their linguistic resources in order to construct oral stories. Most of the time the children were collaborating in a separate room from the normal classroom. The videotapes we used for evaluation show that the pupils, although completing the story in the target language, did indeed extensively negotiate through their many language resources when it came to building the meaning and the structure of the story and of the particular utterances. Thus, different languages allowed for the construction of stories in one precise target language. When working on their own,

children tend to use this strategy spontaneously, in contrast to the contrived situations prevalent in most classrooms.

Autonomy and Auto-evaluation

Perhaps the big trash bin best symbolises the pedagogical approach involved in the making of this unpretentious piece of software. Disposing of an oral production in the trash will make it unavailable for any kind of pedagogical authority, the classroom teacher for example. Language learners thus have the opportunity for acting out their **autonomy** in oral language production. They can have several tries without having to undergo an external evaluation or sanction by an authoritative teacher. Important features of oral discourse like intonation and rhythm can be experimented with. TEO creates extended opportunities for the children's engaging in **auto-evaluation** of their own products and processes, thus breaking up a model of evaluation characteristic of normal classroom discourse which considers a child's answer as right or wrong and hence prevents an active and continuous involvement in the process of understanding. [Cazden, 1988, p. 30] In our videotapes we found many examples of children acting and negotiating while showing empathy with their partners having some difficulties in performance and in understanding. Auto-evaluation could occur at all levels of the process of storying being based on the joint construction of meaning.

The fact that every utterance the children recorded can be replayed and thus be re-evaluated at any time in the course of the construction of the stories constitutes an asset difficult to achieve by other means.

Ownership and Responsibility

In contrast to most educational software TEO allows children to be respected as the owners of their words and stories as well as of their inherent meanings because the content and the form of their stories will be a product of their own negotiations. Personal pride and self-confidence which play an important role in any language learning process can be observed to increase through storying with TEO. Children want to be authors of their own words with a voice of their own. In the evaluation interview mentioned before, when asked "Do you have enough opportunities for talking at school?", a vast majority of children answered in almost the same way as this girl:

"I would like to talk more about myself, about what I imagine, about my future."

As authors, children may dispose freely of their words and eventually put the utterances into the trash bin. As with an adult author, thoughts and words cannot be controlled by another authority, in this case by the teacher.

In this way, language production is not a matter of reproduction of predetermined samples but is the result of a self-determining and self-evaluating process going on between a group of people showing differential abilities in the target language.

Neither the product nor the process are fixed or constrained by the software but are the result of the responsible work of the children. This unusual kind of **responsibility** in the language classroom will foster the development of the children both as learners and as human beings.

Choice and Control

The trash bin also symbolises the **choice** and **control** children have while constructing their own utterances and stories. They may participate in the storytelling process even while just listening. In a normal classroom situation children must speak up if they want to be acknowledged and evaluated accordingly. With TEO the pupils can smoothly prepare their entry into the discourse leading to the construction of the stories. In between themselves and when detached from the stress of production inside the classroom the children manage to be sensitive to the particular needs of each other. They will negotiate parts and utterances to be taken. It is up to the children to decide on the right moment to break their silence and to enter the story and the production process. All the more, it is reassuring that any production deemed unsatisfactory can be disposed of in the trash bin.

Voice

In the language production process TEO allows for the emergence of a “**voice**” articulating values and opinions from a particular point of view. In this way normal ingredients of ongoing everyday conversation like intonation and rhythm as well as laughter and irony enter the classrooms. In most second language learning contexts these features do not reveal themselves easily. This is due to the lack of opportunities for making decisions relating to the content and the process of the ongoing work. Constructing stories with TEO allows for extended periods of planning on behalf of the pupils and encourages larger units of discourse which will serve as a context for clarifying unknown words and sentences. Pupils more knowledgeable in the target language can assist the other children in the choice of appropriate language patterns. But the videotapes collected prove also that Luxembourgish children collaborating in the construction of French stories venture themselves into comparisons and evaluations of French intonational patterns in order to produce 'correct' French as they call it. Again the feedback provided by TEO allows for this highly productive meta-language to occur.

In contrast to educational settings mostly busy with the production of correct sentences I like to adhere to the Bakhtinian use of the term “utterance” for characterising the units children are building upon during the process of elaboration of their own stories:

“Utterances are not the same as sentences; (...) The sentence is a unit of language (in the traditional sense); the utterance is a unit of ‘speech communication’. (...) Even when an utterance is one sentence long, something must be added to the sentence’s linguistic composition to make it an utterance. *Someone must say it to someone, must respond to something, must be accomplishing something by the saying of it.* One can *respond* to an utterance, but one cannot respond to a sentence. (...) Sentences are repeatable. (...) each utterance is by its very nature unrepeatable. Its context and reason for being differ from those of every other utterance, including those that are verbally identical to it. Two verbally identical utterances never *mean* the same thing, if only because the reader or listener confronts them twice and reacts differently the second time. *Context* is never the same. Speaker and listener, writer and reader, also change. No matter how many features they may share, two utterances can never share everything. Each is *unique*, and each therefore means and is understood to mean something different, even when they are verbally the same. The reasons we

speak, the very reasons texts are made, lie in what is *unrepeatable* about them.” [Saul Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 125, 126]

Children seem to be very aware of the unrepeatable character of their everyday experiences and consequently of the language which lends expression to this life of their own. Bakhtin’s voice resounds in the following statement made by a child during the interviews for the evaluation of TEO:

When questioned “What kind of stories do you prefer?”, she replied
“I like stories that last, which have a sense, which speak about something real, about life.”

Authoring in Context

Authoring stories with TEO allows children a safe environment away from overt control by others for exploring the nuances and complexities of language and hence of life. Children can show a remarkable sensitivity for the necessity and for the inevitability of context in language production processes, a context which is all too easily stripped off in the humdrum management of the classroom. In the evaluation interview some children insisted on the need for connections and on the inevitability of context in language production processes:

“If you speak just word for word you already have forgotten half of it.” and

“If you don’t speak several sentences one after another, it doesn’t make sense.”

This awareness also can be an indication why children usually did not easily engage in the work of rearranging the sequence of utterances making up their stories although this possibility was provided by the software. Subsequent rearrangement of bits and pieces of an oral production will only destroy the dynamic combination and flow of oral discourse relying on rhythm and intonation. A static conception of human communication and expression as it is often encountered in school settings is inappropriate for the children and it must be replaced by a dynamic model. The children’s previous comments directly point to such a model as proposed by Bakhtin: «(...) in light of Bakhtin’s dynamic perspective (...) the message is conceived and articulated in consequence of what has already been uttered by the speaker and with regard to his possible future utterances, and in reaction to the previous utterances of an interlocutor, as well as in anticipation of that speaker’s potential future responses not yet said.» [Danow, 1991, p. 62]

Adhering to a dynamic view of communication and expression nevertheless does not deter children from selectively listening again to utterances which they consider as perfect examples of target language use. By providing these possibilities TEO adds to the reflective use of language patterns and can be considered as a tool for reflection and for the implementation of a meta-language.

Dialogue and Collaborative Learning

It is for the uniqueness and for the **unrepeatability** of utterances mentioned above that we have to strive for in our language classrooms. TEO provides for such opportunities as indicated by an 8 year old girl in reply to the question “Do you like to work in a group with TEO?”: “Everybody is talking differently and about different things; it is fun to put all those views together.” During the same interview another second grade girl characterised normal schoolwork as follows: “If you work alone and on your own, all you are doing is repeating the same thing over and over again.”

The use of TEO can significantly contribute to changing the relationship between teacher and child, which in most language learning situations in a regular classroom is purely unidirectional with the child's authority being silenced by the teacher's directives. TEO allows for relations between children as **active** language learners to become predominant. Such relationships enhance the possibilities for **response** and for addressivity, that is for **dialogue**: "Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it." [Bakhtin, 1984, p. 183] and "(...) the language we assimilate comes to us already dialogized, already spoken about, already evaluated; it is encountered and learned as something used and patched, as an aggregate rather than a system. (...) To repeat, speech is always dialogic, and dialogue cannot be reduced to any conceivable linguistic categories; it is metalinguistic." [Saul Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 145]

When collaboratively creating stories with TEO, children can take over responsibility for the contents of the stories and of the language learning process. As we will see, the contents will largely be determined by the living contexts of the children and especially by media influence. By teaming up children with different competences in the target language we break with an established tradition in second language learning based on the separation of the language reception from the language production process.

I think that children intimately want to be active and want to produce language and stories, even if the language they need for this process happens to be a second language: "(...) we cannot understand messages without acting on them." [Cummins, 1994, p. 53]

With the help of more competent peers they will become able to achieve their aims. While producing oral language or texts they will be obliged to listen carefully within the frame of reference and of sense which they have set for themselves. Our approach which draws upon Vygotsky's theories of learning as an interactive process within a sociocultural framework is stimulated by the multilingual situation in Luxembourg. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development [Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86] can be considered as a setting where language, learning and thinking interrelate dynamically and transact with the sociohistorical evolution of the multilingual and multicultural context. The zone of proximal development allows for the potentialities of each child to be actualised in the work with TEO and in collaboration with more knowledgeable peers.

Storying

If we consider storying or narrative to be in Barbara Hardy's words a "primary act of mind" and in Courtney Cazden's terms "a universal function", then the work with TEO can be seen as fitting the frame for language learning set by Ludwig Wittgenstein: "The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language." [Wittgenstein, 1967, § 206]

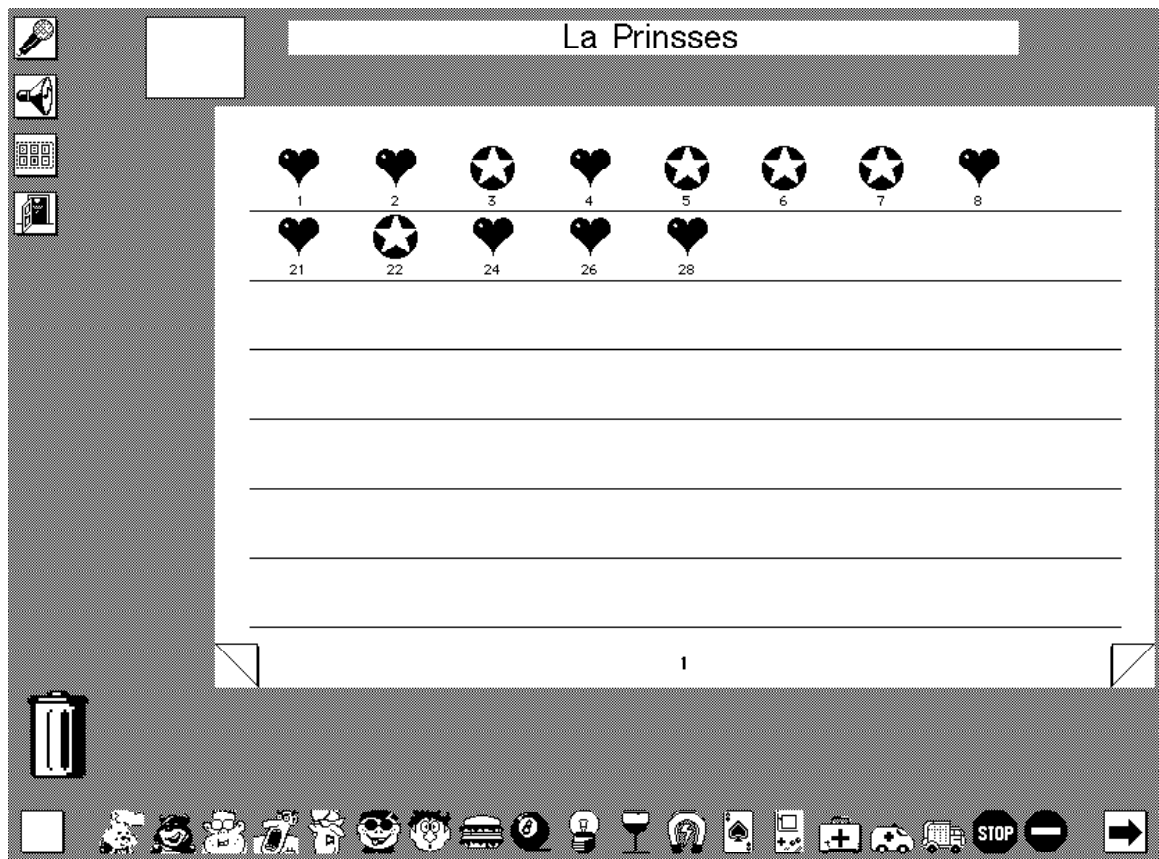
The example below is taken from a second grade class who had just begun work in oral French. The presence of several French-speaking children in the classroom or in neighbouring classes caused the teacher to prefer to use TEO rather than the available audiolingual material.

Writing in French is introduced in the third grade, but in our case, as we can see, the children tried to write the title of the story in French by drawing on their knowledge of sound-to-letter correspondences of the German writing system they were about to master.

It is clear that the transcription cannot give an appropriate idea of the richness of the voices and intonations the children are performing while constructing their dialogues and their story.

La Prinsesses [The princess]

- 1 (1) Ornella Il était une fois ...
[Once upon a time ...]
- 2 (2) Ornella La princesse elle dansait.
[The princess she was dancing]
- 3 (3) Sabrina Le prince il dansait.
[The prince he was dancing]
- 4 (4) Ornella La princesse elle était l'amoureuse de le prince.
[The princess she was the lover of the prince.]
- 5 (5) Sabrina Le prince il
[The prince he]
- 6 (6) Sabrina dansait avec une
[was dancing with a]
- 7 (7) Sabrina l'autre princesse.
[the other princess.]
- 8 (8) Ornella Il voit la princesse et le prince qui sont mariés.
[He sees the princess and the prince who are married.]
- 9 (21) Ornella Le prince il a dit à la princesse: "Comment ça va bien à l'école?"
[The prince he was saying to the princess: "How are you doing fine at school?"]
- 10 (22) Sabrina La princesse elle a dit: "Ca va bien."
[The princess she was saying: "It is all right."]
- 11 (24) Ornella Et le prince il dit à la princesse: "Tu veux faire un bébé?" La princesse elle a dit: "Oui." *{très vite parlé}*
[And the prince he says to the princess: "Would you like to make a baby?" The princess she was saying: "Yes."]
{said very quickly}
- 12 (26) Ornella La princesse parce que c'est sortir le bébé la princesse elle avait respiré fort "H...h...h...h..."
[The princess because it is to get the baby out she breathed heavily "H...h...h...h...h..."]
- 13 (28) Ornella Le bébé était petit.
[The baby was small.]



(The different lay out of TEO is due to it being an older version)

This story was told by two girls, Ornella and Sabrina. Ornella is of Italian origin and Sabrina is a Luxembourgish girl. While recording the utterances both girls participate in the ongoing discussion of the development of the plot. The distribution of the recordings reveals some interesting details. It is Ornella who starts the story with a familiar beginning and a first utterance which is subsequently varied by Sabrina in her first sentence. But this story reveals much more than a mastery of the genre of fairy tales.

The two girls make up a story where, in spite of the presence of the prince-charming, the most important part of the action is performed by the princess. Furthermore, the contents reveal a propensity of children we discovered in many of the recordings from primary schools participating in project TEO. Much of the narrative is conveyed by means of dialogue and illustrates the urgent need outlined by Carolyn Steedman in "The Tidy House": "The children's task was urgent: they needed to understand what set of social beliefs had brought them into being. They used the act of writing [in our case the act of speaking] in order to take part in the process of their own socialisation"[Steedman, 1982, p. 25]

TEO enhances the dialogic nature of communication and thus promotes authentic oral language linked to personal experiences in real life situations. The oral language elaborated with TEO thus stands out favourably against much of the neutral and emotionless interactions characterising normal classroom interactions.

Although fantasy plays an enormous role in creating the stories, realistic orientations keep intruding. Kornëi Chukovsky comments on this state of mind: "With the help of fantasies, tall tales, and topsy-turvy of every type, children confirm their realistic orientation to actuality."[Chukovsky, 1963, p. 113] The distinguished author Maurice Sendak adds: "(...) fantasy cannot be completely divorced from what is real; (...)

fantasy heightens and contributes new insights into that reality.”[Sendak, 1988, p. 74] When working with TEO children, by the virtue of their authorship and ownership of their productions, dispose of the necessary freedom to interweave reality and fantasy. They are free to experiment and thus can continually work towards a grasping of reality.

The experiences with TEO show that these observations hold as well when children are constructing stories in a second language. TEO enables children to record oral language and hence makes available possibilities which hitherto seemed to be the property of written language: “Language is made visible and not only are they [=girls] enabled to understand what it is to consider and reconsider an idea, but the ability to alter the form of that idea - to rub it out and do it again - introduces the more powerful notion of human beings having the power to bring about change.”[Steedman, 1982, p. 92]

The trash bin in the TEO program stands as a symbol for promoting ownership and thus 'the power to bring about change'.

The altering of the existing power relations nevertheless proves to be very difficult because the institutional power keeps intruding in the girls' fantasy play and story. Even princesses have to attend to school and have to meet the expectations of their families and of the existent society at large. The following dialogue is providing evidence for our analysis:

- 9 (21) Ornella Le prince il a dit à la princesse: “Comment ça va bien à l'école?”
 [The prince he was saying to the princess: “How are you doing fine at school?”]
- 10 (22) Sabrina La princesse elle a dit: “Ca va bien.”
 [The princess she was saying: “It is all right.”]

In general Ornella's sentences are very elaborated and complex compared to the level expected in the official French syllabus. In as far as the vocabulary and the sentence structure used in this story are concerned we cannot but be impressed with the variety of the choice of the children. I think that no teacher would have thought of introducing those words and those structures at that moment of the year for these children.

Ornella's vocabulary and structures will influence Sabrina's production in a certain way. In order to be able to complete the utterance “Le prince il dansait avec une l'autre princesse” Sabrina turns to a procedure which was discovered by some children participating in the project TEO: she segments the utterance in major parts and records them separately. By replay she will nevertheless be able to hear herself pronounce an entire French sentence or utterance. Such a procedure has proved to be very successful with children having various speech disorders because of the feeling of satisfaction when they discover that they can after all utter whole sentences. This will boost their confidence and will result in a greater willingness to produce more language. The mediating role of TEO proves to be very superior to that of even a sensitive teacher whose intrusion may often be felt inappropriate in the child's eyes and all too often will prevent any independent effort on the side of the child.

The finished recording does not give evidence of the whole recording and language producing process. We notice that there have been a lot of utterances that have been

placed in the trash bin. Twelve utterances have been eliminated when the girls came about a decisive turn in the story. Certainly there will have been utterances eliminated either because, after discussion, they were not accepted as correct French or because they were not considered to fit into the storyboard. The content of "The princess" is one that is not usually taught in a language classroom. It is one which springs out of the immediate interest of children living in a world dominated by media influences of various kinds. We can easily identify the dance of "The princess" as the dance happening in the film "Beauty and the Beast" which the children were enjoying at that time.

By determining the contents of the stories, children will simultaneously establish a meaningful context wherein they can explore most of the features of the language they set about to learn. The notion of context is to be viewed as "one that brings the verbal and non-verbal 'components' together under one head. The context of the utterance must be held to include, not only the relevant external objects and the actions taking place at the time, but the knowledge shared by speaker and hearer of all that has gone before." [Lyons, 1963, pp. 82, 83] **Storying** provides for this context and enables children to integrate all these verbal and non-verbal factors during a language learning process. Video sequences taped during project TEO allow us to see that children spontaneously use non-verbal features for interaction (gestures or facial expressions, for example) in order to assure the flow of the conversation. In such a way children develop a certain kind of authentic communication in a second language classroom based on the stories they are elaborating in common.

Conclusion

By analysing children's work with TEO we found many features characterising authentic communication with its unexpected turns which are impossible to implement in language teaching led by teachers and determined by a step by step curriculum. TEO can be seen as a medium allowing for children's voice to emerge and to extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom by incorporating partners from different classrooms as well as from local communities. Children's autonomy, choice and control as well as their evaluative and reflective capacities can be enhanced within the dialogues and interactions leading to the common constructions of stories building on "a view of life as a potential source of narrative. Incidents, even apparently slight incidents, have pervasively the potentiality of an interest that is worth retelling". [Cazden, 1992, p. 181]

TEO may enable us, under certain circumstances of classroom management, to articulate, and by the way to interpret, our own stories and facts of life, even if the medium happens to be a second language as the "personal interpretative phase deepens the individual's comprehension by grounding the knowledge in the personal and collective narratives that make up our experience and history". [Cummins, 1994, p. 54] Consequently the use of TEO is indicated for any age group and for any person engaged in the rewarding adventure game of language learning.

It must be conceded that precisely the analysis of the contents of the stories produced in the project TEO has been largely superseded by our concern to demonstrate the viability of the work with TEO in the language learning sequences as laid down in our curriculum. However, it was the belief of all the participating teachers that the concerns of the children as articulated and interpreted in their stories could and should form the bedrock of meaningful language teaching. I have tried to start with such a work by analysing 'La Prinsses'. It is particularly intriguing that children do

choose a medium like TEO to give expression - even in a second language - to their innermost feelings and concerns which they are not likely to communicate to other people during lessons in the classroom. A profound analysis of this phenomenon is still wanting.

The following items from project TEO can be obtained from:

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- a written report: TEO: Développement et évaluation d'un traitement de texte oral
- videos (preschool, second grade, third grade, fifth grade)
- an audio CD with stories from preschool through primary grades and speech therapy to adult education
- a TEO Tool Box with TEO software for MAC and PC and a CD-ROM: Language, Learning and Thinking Dynamically Interrelated

A demo version of TEO can be downloaded at the following Internet address: <http://www.nmg.lu/teo>

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