

3.3. Case Study 3. Building disciplinary knowledge in two languages: a model of bi-/plurilingual education⁴⁰

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Mrs Marisa Cavalli worked as a language teacher for 17 years in the schools of the Aosta Valley in Italy, and is also an author of published didactic materials and of an international manual for teaching French to teenagers. For 23 years, she has been a research teacher at the former Regional Institute for Educational Research for the Aosta Valley (IRRE-VDA) where she has worked in the field of language teacher training, the development of teaching materials, action-research and educational research. She has taken part in actions and projects of the Division and subsequently the Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe, notably in the project "Language in Education - Languages for Education". In this context, she has co-authored various texts including the 'Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education' (2016). She has been involved in three projects relating to Language Policy Profiles in three countries: Slovakia, Luxembourg and Malta. Her field of work is bi-/plurilingual education in relation to the construction of knowledge within the framework of linguistic policies to safeguard minority languages. She is now a consultant to the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe in Graz.

Description of the model and its context

The Aosta Valley (FR: Val d'Aoste), a region of Northern Italy, belongs linguistically to the francoprovençal (Gallo-Romanic speaking) area. French has been the language of administration in the region since 1561, under an edict of Duke Emmanuel Philibert. Progressively, French became the language of the church and, later, of the school. With the unification of Italy in 1861, the Aosta Valley joined the country's Italian-speaking area. In 1948, a special statute was granted to the Aosta Valley by the Italian state. This recognised the Region's bilingualism, and granted it certain legislative and financial autonomy. Article 40 of the statute allows the region to make "adjustments which are appropriate because of local needs" to national education programmes. Since 1948, on the basis of this article, equal numbers of hours of Italian and French have been taught in all school levels in the Aosta Valley education system. Moreover, since 1984, through slow bilingual reforms, all subjects must also be taught in both languages at three levels of education – pre-primary, primary school and secondary school, level 1⁴¹. Thus, bilingual subject teaching is a central feature of the region's education system, although it is open to the foreign languages and ideally also to the languages of its pupils' repertoires. The Aosta Valley model is, therefore, a model of "bi-/plurilingual" education.

When, in 1984, after a long period of reflection, experimentation and training, the reform of bilingual education was formalised for pre-primary schools – and subsequently for other educational levels – decision makers chose to involve all schools, all students and all teachers in bi-/plurilingual education, without distinction. This decision stemmed from a desire not to create divisions or fractures among the population, both between schools and within the teaching profession. The political choice made by the Aosta Valley presupposes that its model for bi-/plurilingual education should be based on the alternation of the region's two main languages, Italian and French. This was certainly far from being an immediately operational didactic option, since what prevailed was the political choice of a certain type of society in which all the speakers, without distinction, would be bilingual,

⁴⁰ This text reproduces very closely the information and reflections contained in two contributions by the author (Cavalli, 2003, 2018). This case study was originally written in French and translated into English.

⁴¹ Despite three successive projects (Cavalli, 2005), second-level secondary schools were only affected by bilingual reform in 2016; this reform will not be discussed here since it is currently suspended.