



MANY VOICES

LANGUAGE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EUROPE

Emerging challenges and innovative responses



CIDREE

Consortium of Institutions for Development
and Research in Education in Europe

Many Voices – Language Policy and Practice in Europe

Emerging challenges and innovative responses

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Foreword

Welcome to the CIDREE Yearbook 2009, *Many Voices – Language policy and practice in Europe – emerging challenges and innovative responses*.

It is hard to imagine a theme that is more essential to education, in probably every country, since language learning provides for the fundamentals for continuous learning and development in almost every other domain. Moreover, language is crucial for deepening mutual understanding, strengthening linguistic diversity, nurturing democratic citizenship and fostering social cohesion. And, of course, (foreign) language competencies are crucial for communication between people from different countries. Thus, it is obvious that language policy is an excellent theme for exchange and discussion among European colleagues, and a highly relevant topic for a CIDREE yearbook.

The many chapters in this book reflect a rich diversity of issues, but also many common challenges, in line with some of the aforementioned aspirations of the Council of Europe on language policy.

The perspectives and emphases throughout the chapters represent a broad range: from policy analysis and formulation, research & development, curriculum, assessment, technology, classroom practices, to student learning. The focus of all contributions is on education for students from ages 4 to 18.

In view of the universality of the challenges and dilemmas for language education, I am sure that the book will be of great value for a wide audience of colleagues in many countries (in Europe and beyond). It will be appreciated by policy makers at many levels, as well as by researchers, developers and school practitioners engaged in language education.

I would like to express our thanks to our Irish colleagues, Hal O’Neill, Marie Riney, Katrina Keogh and Judith Ní Mhurchú for their initiative and fine editorial work on this highly relevant and timely book. And, of course, also our thanks to all contributing authors.

During our CIDREE conference in Dublin (November 2009) this book will be launched and discussed, but it is a stimulating thought that this very book will enrich discussion and reflection beyond this meeting.

Jan van den Akker

President CIDREE 2009-2010

Director General SLO (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development)

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Introduction

—Hal O’Neill, Marie Riney, Katrina Keogh and Judith Ní Mhurchú

In education, as in wider society, languages do not simply throw up questions of the when, where and how variety. They give rise to the questions of why have languages in the curriculum and to what level? What purposes should language curricula serve? These questions should be posed because in education, as in wider society, language policy and planning (or the lack of these) can result in language being a significant determinant of who has access to political power and economic resources and life chances and who does not: in other words who experiences the full meaning of citizenship and who does not.

(Review of Languages in the Post-Primary Curriculum: Report of the First Phase of the Review, NCCA, 2005)

Consideration of language policy – and language education policy – gives rise to questions that go to the heart of education, especially in matters of equity and inclusion. Yet, so completely does language permeate the curriculum that it can be tempting almost to view it as a transparent medium, a willingly neutral servant in the cause of teaching and learning. That would be to ignore the wide variety of challenges that language and languages pose for educators. Language in the curriculum is challenging because it is so bound up with our sense of ourselves, both as individuals and as nations. Furthermore, it challenges us because of the unique space it occupies in the curriculum, being both the content and the medium of instruction at once.

Language is challenging, too, because conceptually it is a slippery entity. Speaking of the history of English, Janina Brutt-Griffler draws attention to a flaw in the commonsense interpretation of its history as occurring in definable stages leading to a finished product, what she refers to as “...a teleological and normative view of language development in which the language as process gives rise to language as final product, its whole development leading to that point. Prior to some arbitrary point in time...the language was incomplete. Now it is complete.” (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, p. 3) So, languages change over time and continue to evolve, even in supposed monolingual settings. In the complexity of the multilingual landscape of our schools languages collide and interact, shaping each other in the process. Our schools are indeed places of many voices and this linguistic diversity provides policy makers with significant challenges and also with opportunities to actualise important aspects of social policy, “...in particular of policies which aim to develop a sense of inclusion and of shared democratic citizenship among Europeans.” (COE, 2007) It is against this backdrop of linguistic diversity that the articles included in this volume have been written, and they address themselves to policy decisions that have been taken by the various countries and the practical initiatives that have been put in place to enact and support those decisions.

The Council of Europe guide for the development of language education policies states that “...language education policies are not simply a matter of pedagogy but are of major political significance because language questions reflect tensions within national communities.” (COE, 2007, p. 9) It draws attention to ideological issues that should be taken into account as factors in the first stage of planning a language education policy. It

is fitting then that the first article included in the CIDREE Yearbook for 2009 focuses in no small measure on the question of ideology and, in particular, the potential richness of interaction between official and non-official discourse in the arena of language education.

France

The contribution from France, written by James Costa and Patricia Lambert, introduces something of the tension between the one and the many, epitomised in the conflicting demands from different segments of the French population regarding language. While a traditional perception of France as a monolingual country persists, over 70 languages are currently listed as *Languages of France*, and while the official dogma asserts the superiority of the French language, plurilingualism is also officially valued in the education system. The authors explore the link between national ideology, language policy and language education policy, and, through a historical overview which touches on official and non-official discourses, they highlight some ambiguities in the relationship between French and other languages, be they foreign languages or immigration languages. Their reminder that ‘English is both the arch-enemy, and also a most desirable language to possess’ exemplifies the irony of the situation nicely.

The school, the learning site, is the principal medium through which the dominant ideology is reproduced, but is also the place where contradictory discourses and tensions are to be found. In reviewing the current language situation of schools the authors point to a deeply rooted tension between multilingual and monolingual perspectives.

But the French education system is no more monolithic than any other, and the article concludes with accounts of two attempts to establish alternative language policies – bilingual education, and pluralistic approaches. Although comparatively successful in themselves, the authors assert that these policy developments at local level show little sign of acceptance by mainstream policy-makers or of becoming part of the main curriculum.

The Netherlands

Daniela Fasoglio and Bas Trimbos provide an overview of what curriculum is and how the modern language curriculum in the Netherlands has been mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR). A model of curriculum development from van den Akker (2003) is described, along with its overview of the many individuals involved in curriculum development, its typology of curriculum representations and its associated curriculum spider web. This article provides a good overview of the CEFR. It outlines how the Dutch national curricula were mapped to the CEFR in a top-down approach and how this has impacted on those who benefit from it in schools. The importance of making its implementation a success is highlighted through the Master Plan, which was an initiative undertaken to ensure all stakeholders participated in the implementation of the revised curricula. The final sections focus on the design process undertaken in the development of a supporting website.

Scotland

Rosemary Delaney and Brian Templeton provide an overview of Scotland's ambitious new Curriculum for Excellence and the position of Modern Languages within it. The four values – wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity – underpin the Curriculum for Excellence. These values have defined Scottish society and they are used as a basis for this inclusive curriculum. A framework comprising 5 levels progressing to qualifications at the senior level is described in the article. This framework ensures that a level of challenge and progress is appropriate at the key stages in a person's learning from age 3 to 18.

Delaney and Templeton describe how an opportunity to review Modern Language teaching and learning approaches presented itself within the Curriculum for Excellence framework. Teachers of Modern Languages were provided with an opportunity to help learners reflect on their first language through comparing it with their second language. The article touches upon how the Modern Languages levels were linked to the CEFR while embracing the *interconnected nature of languages, active citizenship and communicative competence*. The article concludes by outlining the challenges facing teachers of Modern Languages and the policy makers within the CfE framework.

Switzerland

Language policy and education strategies are discussed in the Swiss article submitted by Silvia Grossenbacher and Urs Voegeli-Mantovani. The distribution and variety of languages used in Switzerland, with four national languages and many migrant languages, are explored. While Switzerland has a history of multilingualism, it is the education system which accounts for its citizens' competencies in many languages. Certain elements of language policy are governed by the federal government, with others being the responsibility of or localised by the individual canton. All Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) have committed to implementing mother tongue plus two languages.

The discussion turns to the results of PISA 2000 and the initiatives which were undertaken following its publication. These initiatives were designed to address the low levels of reading literacy reported among 20% of the Swiss population, and entailed (1) *strengthening the language skills of all learners* and (2) *strengthening the language skills of children and young people with weak learning backgrounds*. These initiatives are inclusive for all children and young adults in Switzerland and include fostering the development of the community language(s) of newcomer children, the development of competence in *standard language*, and strengthening the reading and writing skills of all. Research and development on language and reading acquisition are also discussed, to place these and further initiatives in context.

The final sections examine foreign language teaching and research at primary, secondary I and secondary II levels. The discussion focuses on which languages are taught after the mother tongue, and when these additional languages are introduced in each canton. Language teaching and learning emphasise the practical development of functional multilingualism, that is, the ability to understand and be understood. Great advantage is also taken of Switzerland's linguistic diversity with programmes involving language awareness, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and immersion settings being integrated.

Sweden

Eva Wirén looks at changes in policy regarding mother tongue tuition for students with a first language other than Swedish. Recent increases in numbers of students with a foreign background raise questions about how schools can meet the demands of policy, that require municipalities to make provision for the teaching of Swedish as a second language, and tuition and study guidance in students' first language. Decentralisation of the education system has also resulted in changes, particularly with regard to funding, with a reduction of mother tongue tuition in schools as a consequence, and mother tongue tuition having a marginalised and peripheral role in school life. The value and usefulness of mother tongue tuition is often questioned. A further challenge for schools, and for the education system generally in Sweden, is evidence that students with a foreign background do not perform as well as students for whom Swedish is a first language in the overall merit ratings based on students' grades in sixteen subjects. Research has shown that participation in mother tongue tuition appears to have a positive impact on students overall performance. The chapter concludes with recommendations for regulation of mother tongue tuition in compulsory education in order to improve provision and participation, and for coordination of activities and clarification of purpose regarding mother tongue tuition at local school level.

England

In the English submission Pauline Wade and Helen Marshall describe recent policy developments in England, where, although since 2004 languages have ceased to be a compulsory subject in second level schools, there is an increased impetus in language education at primary level, with foreign language teaching to be a statutory requirement for 7-11 year olds by 2011. Their three year longitudinal study examined current practice, finding that there is a steady increase in provision at primary level, but some schools will need support in meeting the statutory requirement by 2011. Although teachers' confidence and proficiency in teaching foreign languages was a challenge in some cases, a considerable number of schools had staff with a language degree. In some schools teachers worked with internal or external specialists to provide foreign language instruction. Staffing changes caused difficulties in ensuring continuity in the languages taught, and in facilitating transition. The article recommends that schools develop well established systems that are not dependent on individual practices to help smooth transition. Other challenges related to progression and assessment, and the report describes how provision of guidelines and resources for teachers, such as the Key Stage 2 Framework, and increased use of resources such as the European Languages Portfolio, the Languages Ladder and other assessment tools is important in helping schools overcome these difficulties, and progress towards the policy defined goal of providing all 7-11 year olds with the opportunity of learning a foreign language.

Austria

The contribution from Austria, written by Rebekka Wanka and Simone Breit, offers insights into initiatives put in place to address the language problems of preschool children. Interestingly, the language initiatives for preschoolers arose in response to results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), assessments targeting 15- and 10-year-old children respectively. Recognising a significant achievement gap between young people from differing social and educational backgrounds, Austria began to focus on the language needs of preschoolers. Language screening assessments were used to identify children in need of support, and the first intervention – Sprachtickets – ‘language tickets’ was put in place in 2005. Evaluation of this initiative revealed significant inconsistencies and the Sprachtickets were redirected to a new concept – Frühe sprachliche Förderung im Kindergarten – ‘early language improvement in the kindergarten’. Subsequently, new language assessment tools were developed, which were more sophisticated and designed to identify an individual support plan for each child. The first early language assessment using the revised screening tools was carried out in 2008.

Evaluations are beginning to show that the new concept – early language improvement in the kindergarten – is working to greater effect, and that the revised assessment instruments and procedures can provide more detailed, ongoing profiles of kindergarten children’s language development and needs. In conclusion, the article outlines the need for further development of the instruments, for further support for assessors, the need to optimise the general conditions of the kindergartens themselves, and the need to ensure that the fullest possible use is made of the free-of-charge kindergarten year in autumn 2009.

Ireland

Katrina A. Keogh and Judith Ní Mhurchú discuss state and educational policy relating to Irish. A change to the proportion of marks to be allocated to the oral component of the state examinations was announced, along with the Irish government’s drive to promote the communicative use of Irish in schools and foster oral competence among students. At the same time, the Minister for Education and Science requested that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) investigate technological solutions which could assist in providing this optional oral examination.

The NCCA embarked on a pilot initiative to integrate mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. The projects proved successful in improving students’ motivation for learning Irish and their competency in Irish. They also provided positive options for oral language use and practice as well as assessment.

Spain

Luisa Martín Rojo, Esther Alcalá Recuerda and Laura Mijares describe the new policies and practices being developed in Spain in line with the many new languages and cultures of newcomers. With just over 9% of their school-going population originating from countries other than Spain, legal plans and education acts have been put in place to ensure the integration and inclusion of all newcomers (including adults). Particular attention is given to the linguistic needs of the school-going newcomer population, but also includes programmes to nurture the languages and cultures of origin. It is estimated that more than 50 diverse languages are now present across Spanish schools; it is noted that the newcomer languages are not yet being used or formally taught as much as they should, to maximise the linguistic benefit which could be available in later years. EU and national initiatives are being devised to address the need to promote and encourage maintenance of community languages.

The discussion in the article turns to a ‘deficit perspective’, where newcomer students are assimilated into the school and society norm, rather than integrated. In the latter scenario, newcomers retain and value their countries and languages of origin as equal to the social norm. The former scenario of assimilation, can lead to segregation of newcomers, where they are perceived to be lacking a trait or skill which is required to assimilate into the societal norm. Where schools are perceived as a microcosm of what society at large embraces and believes, caution must be advised to ensure that the societal norm provides enough scope for diversity, and does not lead to further segregation of newcomers. Initiatives which encourage the separation of newcomer students from the main cohort of students, or follow a submersion model of Spanish-only, would add to the ‘deficit’ perspective. No cognisance is taken of the value of newcomers’ home language(s) as a source of linguistic wealth and knowledge, or in helping to progress students in the language of their new home country.

The article moves on to examine which languages are perceived to be more valued in society. The teaching of the main European languages often takes precedence over local dialects or newcomer languages, as they are perceived to be more beneficial. Interestingly, teaching methods assigned to the teaching of European languages like English, involve more ‘modern’ teaching methods like Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), while other languages are taught using more established methods.

Belgium (Flanders)

Hugo Vanheeswijck at the beginning of his article describes the various challenges facing schools in a multicultural *reality* such as is in existence in Belgium. A complex situation exists in Flanders with three communities speaking three different languages. The official language is Dutch, with French and German being the other two widely spoken languages. Hugo then gives an explanation of formal education in Flanders and how this is implemented by the various governing bodies and educational networks.

The Flemish Government’s Language policy is described in the article as is its implementation. The policy prioritises mastery in Dutch as a tool for social cohesion. The CEFR levels are linked to the learning of Modern Languages within the core curriculum. The provision of Dutch as a second language has formally been in existence in Flanders

since 1970 but this was made uniform in 1993. Since 2003 a training provision for Dutch as a second language has been adopted. The article describes how a number of social situations are dependant on an individual's proficiency in Dutch. Since 2007 nine schools have participated in a Context and Language Integrated learning programme (CLIL), and the article describes how this programme is implemented in promoting modern Languages. The article concludes with a wish for the future, namely that language learning be a priority in the reformation of secondary education that has begun in Belgium.

Croatia

Martina Prpic explores issues relating to the introduction of standardised language assessments in Croatia in 2006. In particular, her submission offers insights into challenges that inevitably arise as a result of variations in the pace of educational development and change. She focuses on the difficulty of writing specifications and developing test items for examinations in modern foreign languages, and of ensuring that the standards set in the tests align with the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), especially where the curriculum documents had been written before the CEFR had come into existence, and where the documents themselves were not outcomes-based. The Croatian experience will be of interest to countries contemplating alignment between national examinations and the levels of the CEFR. Of more general interest, perhaps, is the impact of the introduction of external assessment on 'the discussion on standards and the state of teaching and learning in Croatian education.'

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France and language(s): Old policies, new challenges, towards a renewed framework?

James Costa and Patricia Lambert



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France and language(s): Old policies, new challenges, towards a renewed framework?

— James Costa and Patricia Lambert

Abstract

This article is concerned with the way the French education system deals with new challenges in terms of language, while referring to the (traditional) general framework of language planning in the country. The same principles and mindset that governed the way regional minority languages were treated in the past are now largely determining the way the languages of immigrants and their speakers are treated and considered.

We thus seek to remind readers what the theoretical and practical background to language planning in education is in France, showing how historical factors led to considering linguistic diversity as an unnecessary heritage to be disposed of rather than as an asset. We then move on to examine the state of language teaching generally speaking in the education system, in order to provide a general outlook on the subject.

Finally, through looking at two particular contexts we show that albeit seemingly monolithic at first, the French system can also accommodate diversity to a certain extent.

Introduction

The traditional view of France, in terms of language, is that of a monolingual country. In fact, very few people outside France know that over 70 languages are currently listed as Languages of France (Cerquiglini, 1999). Yet, none of them is in any way recognised as official in any part of the French territory. Education was long seen as one of the main instruments to implement the desired monolingualism (Martel, 2007a) in a country where French only became a language spoken by the entire population by the middle of the 20th century.

Yet, no ideology, however potent and ancient, is monolithic. The official language policy in France has undergone considerable change over the past few years, and this has had repercussions in terms of language education policies, the focus of this article.

The situation is in fact largely one of tension, or stress, between conflicting aspects and demands from different segments of the French population regarding language. While the dominant and official – yet in many ways unspoken – dogma might still be one asserting the superiority of the French language and the necessity to disregard minority languages, whether indigenous or immigrant languages, plurilingualism is officially valued in the education system, in a recontextualisation of the Council of Europe's discourse, and all pupils are required to study at least two foreign languages. The French position remains equally ambiguous regarding the status and position of English in France and in the education system.

This article will thus seek to situate the debate around language education policies in its historical context, and to make more explicit the tensions we referred to above, by identifying

the most salient ones, but also by showing that the system itself is not as monolithic as could be thought from the outside. Two examples will be analysed for this purpose, one institutionally supported, the other one on the margins of the Institution. In this article, the terms regional minority language, regional language, minority language are used interchangeably.

France, language, and language policy

Shohamy has recently defined language policy as “a manipulative tool in the continuous battle between different ideologies” (2006, p. 46). She adds that “*these manipulations occur on a number of levels and in a number of directions but especially in relation to the legitimacy of using and learning certain language(s) [...] in given contexts and societies [...]*” (p. 46).

Her use of the concept of ideology is of particular relevance here, since France was defined in ideological terms long before it came to be defined in terms of practice. Erasure, one of the mechanisms in ideology formation identified by Gal & Irvine (1995) is of particular importance in France: for the French nation to come into existence, a large part of its history and diversity was to be reinterpreted and redefined as non-important or even non existing. According to Shohamy (2006), “*language education policy (LEP) refers to a mechanism used to create de facto language practices in educational institutions, especially in centralized educational systems. LEP is considered a form of imposition and manipulation of language policy as it is used by those in authority to turn ideology into practice through formal education*” (p. 76).

These definitions enable us to define our area of investigation for this article. They point to the fact that dealing with language policies is not an innocent exercise: such an object of investigation deals with the founding ideological principles of nation-states.

The questioning of language policies for research purposes must lead to the questioning of national ideologies, i.e. the very beliefs at the core of national policies. Among the many aspects of ideology, we suggest the following formulation as a basis for our presentation here: “*On the one hand, ideology is no mere set of abstract doctrines but the stuff which makes us uniquely what we are, constitutive of our very identities; on the other hand, it presents itself as an ‘Everybody knows that’, a kind of anonymous universal truth*” (Eagleton, 1991, p. 20).

We ought, of course, to be wary of universal truths, especially when questioning them. Universal truths such as “French is the language of France”, or “French people are bad at languages”, or even “the system cannot be changed, this is the way it is” inevitably point to ideological attitudes. Those views are both influenced by national language policies and influences on those same policies. They can be found in the discourse of media, in textbooks, on the street or, obviously, in schools. Other similar views can be found in official texts and documents. Language policies thus have an official, explicit, aspect, as well as an implicit, unofficial one. We will try to briefly develop an analysis of both those aspects.

Official policy: a historical approach

The Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts (1539) is usually believed to mark the beginning of the making of French as an official language for administrative purposes throughout the

kingdom of France (Balibar, 1985), although there is some debate around the question. This Ordinance is still referred to, even today, in the media or by politicians who wish to oppose any pro-regional language policy.

Yet it is not believed to have altered significantly the daily life of the inhabitants of the kingdom: clerks had already begun to use some French in their official documents, even in the Occitan-speaking lands of the South, where Occitan retained prestige for some time (Judge, 2007). The populations continued speaking their local vernaculars.

The situation was to be altered dramatically at the time of the French Revolution beginning in 1789. If, at first, the new established powers sought to use local languages to communicate with the population (Martel, 1988), after the Terror in 1793, this was ended and French was to be made the sole official language in France. In 1790, Grégoire's survey had shown that only three million people, out of a total population of fifteen million, could speak French fluently. Grégoire's survey was conducted in order to justify the elimination of the various vernaculars in competition with the central norm, which was to become the only legitimate variety of speech in what was to become the French Republic. In 1794, Barère is famous for having stated, in a report to the revolutionary Comité de Salut Public:

“The voice of federalism and of superstition speaks Breton; the émigrés and those who hate the Republic speak German. The counter-revolution speaks Italian; fanaticism speaks Basque. Let us smash these instruments of damage and error... For our part we owe it to our citizens, we owe it to our republic, in order to strengthen it, that everyone on its territory is made to speak the language of the Declaration of the Rights of Man” (quoted in Judge, 2007, p. 22).

A law was subsequently passed on 20 July 1794 prohibiting the use of any other language but French for official use and official documents (Encrevé, 2002).

Yet, those measures still did not really affect the population in its daily life. Indeed, in 1835, a study (quoted in Weber, 1977) shows that only a handful of départements (the new revolutionary administrative unit) were fully French-speaking (although it is not exactly clear what was meant then by this), all located around Paris and North-western France. In 1863, a survey conducted by Duruy, the Minister for Instruction in Napoleon III's government, and analysed in Weber (1977, pp. 498-501) shows that out of 30 million inhabitants, about 7.5 million were monolingual in a local vernacular. Those were to be found mostly in Brittany, Corsica, Occitan-speaking areas, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Alsace.

The 1870 defeat against Prussia, the advent of the Third Republic, and compulsory schooling were to accelerate the spread of French. The Great War gave regional languages a final blow, and by 1920 most parents would be speaking French, or a regional form of French, to their children. Today, regional language transmission in the homes is a very rare phenomenon, although it seems to have persisted longer in Corsica, Alsace, the Basque Country and some parts of Brittany and Bearn, in South-West France.

It must be noted that bilingualism was never considered a serious option, and French was iconically connected with France and Frenchness as from the 19th century and Michelet's monumental work on the history of France (Encrevé, 2002). The Alsatian case is slightly

different, due to the fact that the Province, where a Germanic dialect is spoken, was part of Germany between 1870 and 1918, and then again between 1940 and 1945 (cf. Tabouret-Keller and Luckel, 1981). In today's overseas territories, the situation is also radically different and many languages are still spoken on a daily basis in French Polynesia, French Guyana, the West-Indies and Reunion Island (cf. Cerquiglini, 2003).

Language in education policy

In terms of education policy, things were clear from the very beginning. At the time of the Revolution a schoolmaster was to be appointed in every village to teach the French language, but this was in fact never enacted. If it was generally understood that education was to be given in French, masters are known to have used the local vernaculars in various locations and on many occasions (Martel, 2007b). Yet, in 1870, Gaidoz, Charencey and de Gaulle (the General's great uncle) sent a petition in favour of the acceptance of local idioms in schools to the National Assembly. The arguments used then are still used today: bilingualism was presented as an intellectual asset, citizens were thought to deserve equal respect disregarding what language they spoke, and local languages were presented as bridges towards related languages across national borders.

The 1870 French defeat made it impossible for the petition to even be considered. Times had changed, and revenge on Germany was to become a priority. It was then out of question to promote languages which could be used to communicate with neighbours which could all be seen as potential enemies. Local languages could only be seen as a threat, which in fact comforted the arguments given at the time of the Revolution. Even today, pro-French language discourses frame regional languages as an inside enemy in the struggle against English.

When the famous 1882 Jules Ferry school laws were passed, no mention whatsoever was made of languages other than French. The question was obviously not on the cards, and languages other than French were seen as non-existent. In fact, Colonisation rendered the question obsolete, and politicians had their minds now set upon other questions in terms of language.

Several debates took place in Parliament around the question of regional languages and education (Martel, 2005), to no avail, until 1925 when the minister in charge of education, A. de Monzie, ordered that only French be used in all schools. Monolingualism – and monolingualism in the legitimate norm – was seen as the only acceptable choice.

It was not until 1951 that a bill was passed in Parliament authorising Occitan, Breton, Catalan and Basque to be taught in schools as an optional subject outside normal school hours by voluntary teachers (Martel, 2007b).

The situation has moved on, and regional languages can now officially be taught as part of the curriculum, and some bilingual primary schools exist in parts of the country, as we will see later in this article. Regional languages can no longer be considered a threat to the supremacy of French, although it can be argued that they never were. In fact, they were used instrumentally to promote a certain vision of France as a homogeneous country. In France, “the search for self-identification led to a reification of France itself as a natural and indivisible entity” (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998b, p. 197).

Non official discourses

The effect of the dominant – monolingual and centralist – ideology is reflected in the dominant media to this day, and in the dominant public discourse. It is common in the discourse of teachers (Lambert, 2005), and it is also to be found in schoolbooks.

In a study conducted in 2009, we analysed several history and geography books designed for teaching those subjects at secondary school level (4e classes, pupils between 13-14 years old), as well as the official programmes to which they referred, and we found that despite a general discourses in favour of individual plurilingualism, societal multilingualism was neither perceived nor presented as a desirable option.

Language diversity is still presented as a potential source of problems and violence and is constantly presented alongside the religious question in Europe, thus contributing even more to the association of diversity with tension.

Present day manuals still illustrate what Blommaert & Verschueren (1998a, 1998b) call the dogma of homogeneity, i.e.:

A view of society in which differences are seen as dangerous and centrifugal and in which the 'best' society is suggested to be one without intergroup differences. In other words, the ideal model of society is monolingual, monoethnic, monoreligious, monoideological (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998b, p. 195).

Schoolbooks, as well as the official syllabus, are still very much marked by the dominant ideologies which they tend to reproduce, despite claims to the contrary. In fact, the situation seems to have changed very little since the 1980s (Martel, 1983).

Regional languages of France are now recognised in the Constitution as a part of the national heritage, which incidentally does not grant their speakers any specific right to use their language in public. Regional languages are by now almost totally gone as means of everyday communication (Héran, et al., 2002), recognising them symbolically is thus, in practical terms, of limited importance.

Languages in the current education system

So far, we have discussed France and *language*. The general attitude to language in France does of course determine, to a certain extent, the way in which languages are perceived and conceived of. Many other elements would nevertheless need to be taken into account and the way in which *languages* are treated in the education system responds to conflicting logics. There is indeed a tension between the imagining of France as a monolingual nation and the necessity to teach foreign languages on the one hand, and the necessity to take immigration languages on the other, particularly in the context of a reframing of the dominant discourse on the French language itself, which now tends to value linguistic diversity as a desirable, yet abstract, state of affairs. Romance languages, English, regional minority languages, “rare languages”, as the system calls languages such as Russian, Chinese, Arabic or even Portuguese, are all seen in different ways according to what stakes they convey and to what ideological positions they refer. English is both the arch-enemy, and also a most desirable language to possess in one’s linguistic repertoire. The former Minister for Education even

declared in September 2008 that he wanted every pupil to become bilingual in English. The ideologies surrounding languages are clearly becoming more and more complex, and vary according to the situation in which they are expressed and the people who voice them.

School is obviously one of the most potent instruments of language policy, and has been used to redefine legitimacy and authority in terms of language, and to reframe identity in a way that suited the Central government (Jaffe, 1999, 2001). Education thus continues to be the principal medium to reproduce the dominant ideologies, yet at the same time it is a site where contradictory discourses and tensions are to be found.

Assets

As can be read in the 2008 Eurydice Network report,

*“Since the beginning of the 2007/08 school year, it has in principle become compulsory for all pupils aged 7 to learn a foreign language. At 14, only the pupils who have taken the option “*découverte professionnelle*” (initiation to professional life) (6 hours per week), no longer learn two foreign languages as compulsory subjects”* (Eurydice Network, 2008, p. 30).

Languages are thus at the very core of the French education system, it can be said, and the Common Base for Knowledge and Skills requires that a foreign language must be mastered by all pupils at the end of compulsory education (cf. Coquidé, et al., 2008). It must be added that there are a host of optional languages which can also be studied, in addition to the compulsory ones: classical languages such as Latin and Greek, regional minority languages (Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican, Creole languages, Tahitian, Occitan – in all its regional varieties –, as well as German in Alsace and Flemish in the areas of Northern France where it is traditionally spoken).

Yet, it must be said that in fact the vast majority of pupils study English as a first foreign language, and all must study English at some stage during their compulsory school years. This is both a result of the existence of a utilitarian ideology which views languages primarily as assets in terms of economic success, as well as of the education policy in France which has tended to promote a small number of languages, namely English, German and Spanish. For various reasons, German is declining steadily, except in Alsace, and Spanish seems to be mainly chosen as a second language. In fact, most parents and pupils demand English as the first foreign language, and this trend is more and more obvious.

As far as regional languages are concerned, over 400,000 pupils follow some form of teaching in or of a regional language (cf. Costa, 2008). While this might seem an important figure, it covers a wide range of situations, which might include bilingual classes as well as classes where a song might occasionally be learnt in a regional language. Also, conditions are still far from ideal, and many teachers in secondary education must still teach during lunch hours, as the system is clearly not designed to accommodate such a wide variety of situations.

A plan is currently being implemented to promote German in the education system, which includes an offer in terms of German language in schools in all *Académies* (the educational administrative divisions in France), and an increase of 20% within five years of the total

number of pupils studying German at primary school level. The language should also be offered in secondary education in all locations where it can be studied in primary schools, and it will be increasingly possible to study both German and English in the first year of secondary education.¹

The whole education system is undergoing change as regards language. *A Plan de Rénovation des Langues* was set up in 2005 in order to develop skills in foreign languages and to introduce the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages into the system. This is still taking place as we write, and major changes are being implemented in the way foreign languages are taught in schools.

Tensions

As has by now become apparent, a large number of languages are present in the French education system, illustrating a wide panel of sociolinguistic situations. While English is the dominant foreign language throughout the system and throughout most of the territory, regional languages are still present, although clearly not a priority. For political reasons, German is promoted at all levels and Spanish has a well-established niche as a second foreign language for most pupils (Eurydice Network, 2008).

So far both foreign languages as well as regional minority languages have been mentioned. One (highly heterogeneous) group of languages has been strikingly absent, i.e. languages spoken by immigrants and their descendants. Over 400 languages are spoken in France, as was found in a 1999 survey (Héran, et al., 2002), and among them, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian as well as some Bantu languages and other Asian and African languages are being transmitted to the younger generations. They are conspicuously absent from the education system. It is a fact that Arabic is offered as a foreign language in some secondary schools, but in forms most often quite dissimilar to the ones found in the pupils' repertoires (Billiez, et al., 2003). Similarly, some immigrant language classes are offered in areas where a demand exists, as part of an ELCO² programme. Such programmes have led to a series of difficulties and have raised many issues (Billiez and Trimaille, 2001).

As Billiez, et al. point out (2003, p. 301), it is only recently that sociolinguists have begun to study the way plurilectal repertoires were valued and used in educational settings in France: what type of language classes could be implemented? In what type of curriculum? What would be the effects of such measures on the children themselves?

A large amount of research is still needed in this field, especially as competing discourses advocating an all-French approach are still dominant in the media as well as among teachers. In fact, the education system still functions with two basic assumptions:

“the integration assumption – that is, the assumption that multilingualism is an obstacle for societal and national integration into a coherent nation-state. [...] The second assumption could be called the efficiency assumption – that is, the assumption that efficient government, as well as economic growth and development, are hampered by multilingualism” (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998b, p. 206).

¹ <http://eduscol.education.fr/D0156/all-plan-langue.htm?rub=101>

² Enseignement de Langue et de Culture d'Origine, or Teaching of Language and Culture of Origin. Those programmes are set up between France and the countries of origin of pupils.

There is therefore a deep rooted tension between a system which is opening up to European multilingualism, on paper at least, and the increasingly multilingual reality of the country, in conjunction with an underlying assumption which still furthers integration as assimilation.

Challenges: towards a renewed system?

The French education system, like all systems, is however not monolithic, far from it. Many changes have occurred in the past few years as regards language and languages, and despite the fact that old ideological reflexes are still dominant, a large amount of variation does exist, and the dominant model is also being challenged, both from within and as a result of greater European integration.

As Shohamy put it,

“Yet, at times, LEP [Language Education Policy] is also used as a bottom-up, grassroots mechanism to negotiate, demand and introduce alternative language policies” (Shohamy, 2006, p. 76).

We shall now examine two examples of such attempts to establish alternative language policies.

Bilingual education

Although by bilingual education we mean a system which integrates two languages as both object and medium of education, which would include, in France, several types of experimentations (such as European and International Sections, where one academic subject is partially taught in a foreign language), we will concentrate here on a form of bilingualism which gives both languages equal representation in terms of time. This system is only available for some regional languages, namely Breton, Occitan, Corsican, Basque, Catalan as well as German, considered a regional language in Alsace.

As a result of parents’ pressure in the 1970s, and, with the opening of private immersion schools in Brittany, the Basque Country, Northern Catalonia, Languedoc and Aquitaine, the state took action and created its own bilingual primary system, where children are educated in French and in a regional minority language for equal numbers of hours.

The system welcomes an ever-increasing number of pupils: in 2008-2009³, there were over 57,000 pupils involved in bilingual education in France at primary level, 70% of which in the public system, 15% in religious private schools and an equal number in private non-profit immersion schools run by parents.

Although systems vary, there is a tendency, in the public sector, to opt for an organisation whereby the same teacher teaches in both French and the minority language, thus enabling cross-subject work in both languages, as well as a more global approach to language as a phenomenon (Cortier, 2008).

³ <http://www.flarep.com/>

In terms of the organisation of the system itself at the level of schools, while Corsica has adopted all-bilingual schools, on the Continent there tends to be one bilingual section among otherwise monolingual schools, which is not without begging questions as to the finality of bilingualism. The chosen approach does not focus on language revitalisation but on the children's cognitive development, although both can be compatible.

Such an organisation in terms of language repertoires fits with Candelier's definition of pluralistic approaches:

"While "singular" approaches address one particular language or culture taken in isolation, pluralistic approaches are teaching approaches in which the learner works on several languages or cultures simultaneously" (Candelier, 2008, p. 225).

In a way, bilingual education thus constitutes a more and more institutionalised integration of pluralistic approaches. Yet, the system is only really operational for primary education. Bilingual sections do exist in secondary schools in the Occitan-speaking regions, in Brittany, Corsica and elsewhere, but they usually consist in a greater number of hours in the regional language and the teaching of one academic discipline, usually history-geography, through the medium of the minority language.

Bilingual education needs to be analysed "as a component of a wider social economic cultural and political framework" (Hélot, 2003). It is yet unknown what consequences the development of this system could bear on language policy in the education system as a whole.

Pluralistic approaches

We gave the definition of pluralistic approaches in the former section, and bilingual education as a potential illustration in some cases where languages are taught together, and not as discrete entities.

Other approaches include

the integrated teaching and learning of languages taught (building for instance on the learner's own language to facilitate access to a first foreign language, or on a first foreign language to facilitate access to a second one [...], the intercomprehension between related languages [...], and, of course, the inter- (or cross-) cultural approach [...] (Candelier, 2008, p. 225),

and, most saliently, language awareness programmes. Those approaches, even though they might be part of some teacher's everyday class experience, are by no means institutionalised as such. They nevertheless aim at transcending the problems caused by a dichotomous approach in terms of monolingualism vs. bilingualism, and more generally they seek to explore new ways of teaching and approaching languages as well as language as a phenomenon.

In 2007, the European Centre for Modern Languages accepted an international project as part of its 2008-2011 programme ("empowering language professionals") which aimed to combine intercomprehension approaches and language awareness activities to integrate regional minority languages and other languages present in the children's environments. The project, named EBP-ICI,⁴ and in which the authors of this article participate, seeks

⁴ Education Bi-Plurilingue, Intercompréhension et Compétences Interlinguistiques. See the project website for more information, in French and English : <http://ebp-ici.ecml.at>.

to identify various interlinguistic strategies which guide intercomprehension processes, at primary and secondary school level. Thus, working with teachers of Occitan in Provence and with partners in the Val d'Aoste, Catalonia and Scotland, we have developed partnerships between schools in which several related languages are spoken or taught, as well as, generally, English (see Cortier, 2009 for a more detailed presentation).

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above presentation, at the roots of the French education system stands a deep rooted ideological system which promotes monolingualism as well as one specific social norm of French. A homogeneous vision of society is both sought and promoted through education, but this is the case throughout Europe (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998b). In this respect, France is no exception.

Yet the dominant ideology is itself not homogeneous, and the structure of power relations between languages, i.e. between their speakers, has evolved over the past 50 years. Regional languages may have almost disappeared from the public scene, yet activists have succeeded in establishing them in the public system of education, although at its margins.

Other initiatives involving pluralistic approaches have been successfully developed over the past 15 years, but they are not part of the main curriculum and show no signs of being accepted by mainstream policy-makers. Those include ways of integrating all the languages present in the pupils' environment into the system, bearing in mind that no child should feel downgraded for the languages they hold in their repertoire.

Experimentation is therefore possible in the French education system, and many others are currently taking place. Yet, one may question their ability to ever become generalised, given the vitality of traditional ideologies and the lack of concern for societal multilingualism in France.

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From foreign language policy to language teaching practice: Raising the stakes for the stakeholders

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From foreign language policy to language teaching practice: Raising the stakes for the stakeholders

—Daniela Fasoglio and Bas Trimbos

Abstract

Since 2007, the attainment targets for foreign languages in Dutch secondary education have been related to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference. As a consequence, foreign language curricula had to be re-designed based on levels of communicative competence, providing criteria for planning and assessment of language learning in order to reach such levels. To achieve successful implementation of the new curriculum, it is crucial to get all stakeholders involved in the process: teachers, parents, employers, school managers and learners. How is it possible to ensure that teachers feel committed, co-responsible and willing to change? One of the answers to this question is found in the choice of an adequate design process for teaching materials aimed at facilitating the implementation process. Language teachers should take an active role in such a process. In this article we report on the first phases of a complex implementation plan and outline some quality aspects for success: a thorough and broad problem analysis clarifying the need for change; particular attention to the teachers' key role; small-scale pilots from early phases on; continuous attention to formative evaluation and evidence-based data. The approach in interaction with language teachers can serve as a model for other stakeholders, too.

Introduction

Since the authors of this article started working at the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), they have been confronted daily with curricular issues. These, in their international, national and local dimensions, constitute the core business of SLO. One of the major challenges for the SLO Foreign Language Team in the last few years has been the implementation of the competence levels, described in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), into Dutch secondary education. In this article we first briefly recall van den Akker's model of curriculum development and implementation, which has helped us set out the steps of our implementation process. Next, we summarise the main characteristics of the CEFR and its position in foreign language curriculum development at the different curricular levels. Then we report on the first phases of a comprehensive implementation Master Plan, involving the main stakeholders in language education. In particular, we illustrate how we are proceeding in the development of adequate information and teaching tools to facilitate the implementation. We end with a description of the design model applied in this development process and we look ahead to some of our next challenges.

Curriculum development and developers

Although curriculum has many possible meanings, it usually refers to a written plan outlining what students will be taught. The Latin word 'curriculum' refers to a 'course' or 'track' to be followed. In the context of education, where learning is the central activity,

the most obvious interpretation of the word curriculum is then to view it as a ‘plan for learning’ (cf. Taba, 1962).

As van den Akker (2003) states, curriculum development takes place at various levels (from supra to nano, see Table 1), often referring to a long and cyclical process with many stakeholders and participants.

Table 1: Levels of curriculum

Supra level	International policy
Macro level	National policy
Meso level	School
Micro level	Classroom
Nano level	Individual/personal

Supra represents the international level; in the case of the CEFR, it represents a European level.

Macro level deals with the national system. In the Dutch educational system, attainment targets for secondary education are set by the Ministry of Education that publishes examination programmes and syllabi concerning all subjects.

Meso level pertains to schools and school organisations. The meso level is particularly prominent in the Netherlands, where schools are supposed to actively develop their own profile. Decentralisation and delegation of decision-making powers to local schools have become even greater since the revision of examination programmes in 2007. Schools may decide when and in which form they are to examine their pupils, and even diversify programmes and contents according to specific needs, provided that they meet the global standards specified by the Ministry of Education at macro level. Some schools stimulate their teachers’ active involvement in this developing process, in the conviction that this will increase their commitment and offer more guarantees of success in the implementation.

The **micro** level refers to the classroom, where learning actually takes place, whereas the **nano** level addresses individual/personal plans for learning.

It becomes clear that it is not just governmental policy makers who play an essential role in the complex curriculum development process, but also school managements and teachers; the latter, in particular, are crucial in achieving successful implementation. We will come back to this later in this article.

Apart from the various curriculum levels, curriculum also has different representations. A common broad distinction is between the three levels of the ‘intended’, ‘implemented’ and ‘attained’ curriculum. A more refined typology is outlined in table 2.

Table 2: Typology of curriculum representations (van den Akker, 2003)

Intended	Ideal	Vision (rationale or basic philosophy underlying a curriculum)
	Formal/Written	Intentions as specified in curriculum documents and/or materials
Implemented	Perceived	Curriculum as interpreted by its users (especially teachers)
	Operational	Actual process of teaching and learning (also: curriculum-in-action)
Attained	Experiential	Learning experiences as perceived by learners
	Learned	Resulting learning outcomes of learners

It goes without saying that there are often tensions between the various levels. Actors, especially teachers, involved in the second and third level of curriculum development may interpret a vision differently from its original underlying philosophy. This discrepancy can have quite an impact on the outcomes of both.

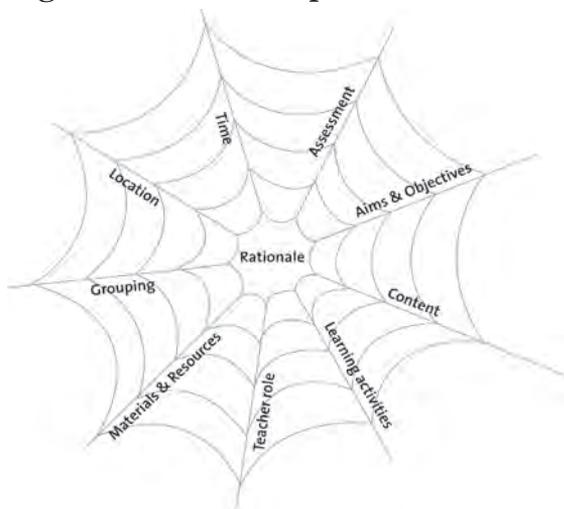
One of the major challenges for curriculum improvement is creating balance and consistency between the various components of a curriculum. Van den Akker (2003) has designed a framework of ten curriculum components that addresses ten specific questions about curriculum:

Table 3: Components of the curricular spider web (van den Akker, 2003)

<i>Rationale</i>	Why are they learning?
<i>Aims & objectives</i>	Toward which goals are they learning?
<i>Content</i>	What are they learning?
<i>Learning activities</i>	How are they learning?
<i>Teacher role</i>	How is the teacher facilitating their learning?
<i>Materials & resources</i>	With what are they learning?
<i>Grouping</i>	With whom are they learning?
<i>Location</i>	Where are they learning?
<i>Time</i>	When are they learning?
<i>Assessment</i>	How to assess their learning progress?

Van den Akker's preferred visualisation of the ten components is that of a spider web (figure 1), which not only illustrates the interconnections among them, but also the vulnerability of the whole system:

Figure 1: Curricular spider web



The CEFR: A history at the supra level

The supra level becomes increasingly visible through international policy discussions, where common aspirations and frameworks are formulated. The Common European Framework of Reference for language learning, teaching and assessment (CEFR) is a good example of this tendency within the European Union. In 1991, a conference in Switzerland resulted in the decision that a so-called 'Common European Framework of Reference' should be developed, which was supposed to describe the different levels of competence in a modern language. The document was to make comparisons between different countries possible and consequently stimulate collaboration among all kinds of European educational institutions. It was to offer a common framework for the assessment of language qualifications (diplomas, certificates) and the development of curricula, educational resources and test materials. All parties involved in language education – pupils, students, teachers, developers of educational resources, institutes of educational measurement and educational managers – were to benefit from it. In order to achieve this aim, a system of levels for language proficiency was developed, which was to be used everywhere in Europe.

Six levels, five language skills

The CEFR describes language competence according to five language skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. For these five skills, six levels of competence are distinguished in the European document and have received the following names:

- Breakthrough
- Waystage
- Threshold
- Vantage
- Effective operational proficiency
- Mastery

When we link these levels to the classical categorisation, into a basic, an intermediate and an advanced level, we get a branched system starting with a first division into three broad levels A, B and C, and a subdivision into A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2, as shown in the following table (table 4):

Table 4: Categorisation of levels

A		B		C	
basic user		independent user		proficient user	
/	\	/	\	/	\
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Breakthrough	Waystage	Threshold	Vantage	Effective Proficiency	Mastery

The first level only requires starter’s knowledge (A1). After that, the level climbs up to C2, which describes near-native mastery. These levels are applicable everywhere in Europe, thus making an international comparison of language levels between learners in the different countries possible.

Global scale

The table below (table 5) describes overall language learner’s competences after reaching each of the six levels. All skills are included.

Table 5: General description of CEFR levels (Council of Europe, 2001)

Proficient user	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent user	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics, which are familiar, or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic user	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Further specification through descriptors

The above holistic descriptions of language proficiency levels have been further specified and elaborated into general and detailed descriptors. In this way, a comprehensive, coherent system has been developed, representing realistic objectives for foreign language learning to be used in educational contexts across Europe. The levels are cumulative, as language learning is a cumulative process: the achievement of any of the levels implies that all the underlying levels have been achieved as well. In 2001 the “*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*” was published, providing guidelines to European countries for the description of national core objectives and attainment targets

in terms of competence levels.

The CEFR and its place in Dutch national curricula (macro and meso level)

With the CEFR, foreign languages have found a perfect common reference point to shape a broad curriculum development process. The CEFR formulates learning targets, describes what language learners have to do in order to achieve communication goals successfully and defines levels of language proficiency in order to measure language progress. It provides a common basis for a broad curricular approach to foreign language learning and for the elaboration of national programmes and materials across Europe. Also, it situates plurilingualism in a broad curricular perspective by describing and giving formal recognition to partial skills, making (general and specific) language learning objectives explicit and enhancing language learning awareness.

In 2003, the Dutch Ministry of Education commissioned a more detailed description of competence levels in the form of concrete ‘can do’-statements, in order to ensure the realisation of a curricular strand for modern languages at the CEFR levels. The project resulted in the publication ‘Taalprofielen’ (Language profiles, 2004), validated by the Dutch National Testing Institute (CITO). The publication gives an overview of all levels of the CEFR, illustrated with can do-statements, and examples of concrete situations of language use.

Table 6: Examples of two can do-statements relating to the general descriptor ‘Informal conversations’ at level A2 spoken interaction (Liemberg & Meijer, 2004: 57).

Spoken interaction A2
<i>Detailed descriptors and examples</i> All the examples relating to A2 imply that the participants directly involved in the interaction speak slowly and clearly to each other. The initiative is generally not taken by the A2 speaker.
1. Informal conversations
<i>In everyday situations I can address acquaintances and strangers in a simple way, I can greet them and apologise for something.</i>
Example: Call for the waiter in a restaurant and ask him something Apologize for bumping into another person Address somebody in the street to ask for information and thank him/her
<i>I can say in a simple way what I like and dislike, and can express an opinion on familiar everyday topics.</i>
Example: Compliment a friend on his/her clothes Express the wish to take part in a game or task Tell the shop assistant that you don't want to buy the product Tell what kind of food you like and ask others what their favourite food is Tell in a vacation job or while on a work placement that you find the work too heavy or too difficult

In 2005, the Dutch Ministry of Education asked SLO to relate the new globally described attainment targets for foreign languages in upper secondary education to the levels of the CEFR. This turned out to be a comprehensive top-down operation at the macro level, the results of which were described in syllabi and handouts, including cd-roms with samples of performances scaled at CEFR levels. In 2007, the handouts were sent to all upper secondary schools in the Netherlands, although not all language teachers were reached in this way, due to logistical problems.

In 2006, the Dutch Association of Teachers in Modern Languages (*Levende Talen*) asked SLO to tentatively relate core objectives for English and attainable levels for French and German in lower secondary education (first two years) to the CEFR. SLO, together with some language teachers, compared the broadly described core objectives to the levels of the CEFR. The core objectives were linked to the five skills of the CEFR. The next phase was to estimate what levels pupils at the end of lower secondary education would be able to reach. To verify the estimations made, teachers were asked to gather samples of their pupils' language productions. This resulted in a table of "levels to be reached" at the end of lower secondary education (Table 7).

Table 7: Levels to be reached at the end of lower secondary education - an example for English (Trimbos, 2006)

English	BB (vocational)	KB (pre-vocational)	GT (pre-vocational)	Havo (pre-general education)	Vwo (pre-university)
Listening	A1	A1/A2	A1/A2	A2	A2/B1
Reading	A1	A1/A2	A1/A2	A2	A2/B1
Speaking (interaction)	A1	A1/A2	A1/A2	A2	A2
Speaking (production)	A1	A1/A2	A1/A2	A2	A2
Writing	A1	A1/A2	A1/A2	A2	A2

Again, the publication illustrating the project results included a cd-rom containing samples of CEFR-scaled pupils' performances.

The new CEFR-related attainment targets became operative for pre-vocational education examinations in 2009. They will become operative for general and pre-university education in 2010 and 2011 respectively. SLO looked for the match between the formulation of the existing attainment targets and the CEFR level descriptions, and consequently assigned CEFR target levels to the different abilities in all languages that are officially taught in Dutch secondary education. An example of the results of this analysis can be seen below (table 8):

Table 8: CEFR related target levels for pre-university education

	listening	speaking (production)	speaking (interaction)	writing
English	B2	B2	B2	B2
French	B2	B1+	B1+	B1
German	B2	B2	B2	B2
Spanish	B2	B1+	B1+	B1

Also in 2005, CITO, who develop examinations and carry out related research in the Netherlands, analysed the national reading exams¹ of the two preceding years and scaled them according to CEFR criteria. The results of their analysis have provided design specifications for the new CEFR-calibrated national examinations that CITO is to develop:

Table 9: Design specifications for the new CEFR-scaled national exams

	percentages scaled reading assignments for pre-university education
English	85% B2
	15% C1
French	60% B1
	40% B2
German	20% B1
	75% B2
Spanish	5% C1
	50% B1
	40% B2

At present, CITO is carrying out a similar analysis for listening, the results of which will soon be published.

In the near future, one of the language teachers' biggest challenges will be the assessment of productive abilities. This means that they will have to become skilled in using assessment criteria related to the CEFR. Prior to this, acceptance and ownership are first needed, in order to tune learning and teaching processes to the new, CEFR-based curriculum and to make it operational. This is going to be our next challenge in the implementation process - bridging the gap between intended curriculum, teaching realities and learning outcomes.

CEFR in the classroom (micro and nano level): Involving those with the highest stake

As stated earlier, the micro and nano levels pertain to teachers, pupils and learning materials. Not only does curriculum development influence school practice and school organisations,

¹ Dutch foreign language national exams consist of reading comprehension assignments, covering a 2.5 hour examination time. CITO also provides exam papers and materials for listening. Exams testing productive abilities are usually developed by language teachers.

its successful implementation also depends on them. Consequently, synergy is needed from the early phases. At the beginning of 2008, the formal curriculum related to the CEFR had been written. We had to move on to the following, more complex phase - implementation. Our next challenge as curriculum developers was - how to provide information and enhance acceptance? How to realise commitment? Without these elements, our curricular operation would remain an intended one, and never become operational.

All experts working at Dutch educational institutions knew all too well that the key for making the CEFR a success story was to get all main stakeholders to participate directly in the implementation process. In 2008, we decided to join our efforts into a comprehensive CEFR Master Plan; the Dutch Ministry of Education agreed to finance this complex operation.

Test developers, the language teachers' organisation, teacher training institutes and SLO are participating in the Master Plan. The project aims to:

- provide stakeholders with clear, complete and useful information about the CEFR, its role in Dutch education, in language teaching and in the learning process, and in international education and the labour market;
- provide language teachers and learners with practical, effective and adequate tools in order to enable them to use the CEFR scales in (self) assessment situations;
- provide language teachers and learners with CEFR related certification possibilities;
- offer language teachers practical, effective and adequate training materials and sessions to use the CEFR in their teaching practice.

www.erk.nl: A CEFR portal for the Dutch educational field

SLO took a coordinating role within the Master Plan as far as the design of informative and teaching tools was concerned.

Before starting, we formulated some guidelines on aspects deemed necessary to reach our target:

a) Think big, start small

Changes in curricula are hard to implement and difficult to sustain; above all, this process needs time. We should not pretend that wide consensus can be achieved immediately; first there is a need to create commitment, start with small-scale pilots, evaluate results and revise drafts. The ultimate goal was large-scale implementation that should be preceded by a whole series of small-scale goals.

b) One size does not fit all

Language teachers are professionals operating in different scenarios. Successful curriculum development can only take place when it is well balanced with all the components of the curricular spider web. Choices made within one single component are related to and have consequences for all the others. For instance, the organisation of learning activities will have to be adjusted to the size of the classroom and its facilities (location); the activities should be in accordance with the learning objectives which have first been defined; activities and

grouping will also determine the teacher's role. But also vice versa, language teachers will take roles that suit them, and choose fitting learning activities and materials. What must be guaranteed is the steady link to the core of the spider web, the rationale.

c) Develop for teachers, and with teachers

Curriculum development processes need a strong communicative component. The development of our tools had to be supported by:

- i. a thorough needs analysis;
- ii. broad consensus of the stakeholders in the implementation process;
- iii. formative evaluation sessions and testing activities during different design phases.

d) Share responsibilities, provide support

To provide effective support to language teachers it was crucial that we should get them involved in the design process and work toward shared responsibilities in curriculum development.

e) It is the learner who eventually makes it

Last but not least: among the stakeholders in the implementation process, we should not forget the ultimate users of the CEFR - the pupils themselves. We had to find a way to get them too, involved in the design process.

Design phases

Media selection and type of product

Even during the very early discussions and exchanges of ideas, it became clear that we should give IT a prominent role in our project. The internet was the best way to reach all language teachers in Dutch education in an easy, flexible way, to update instruments when needed, and to make them interactive.

We decided to design a CEFR portal and we selected five categories of stakeholders who were going to get their own profile on the website: Language teachers, pupils, school managers, parents and employers.

A development team was constituted within the SLO, consisting of ourselves and our colleague Anne Beeker. The team would, in some cases, be supported by our other FL team members, Jos Canton, Dirk Klein and Ella van Kleunen.

Objectives

Our implementation tool had to fulfil the following goals:

- provide information;
- provide support in training;
- provide practical tools for teaching/learning practice.

Qualitative requirements

Our implementation tool had to meet the following qualitative standards:

- relevance;

- consistency;
- usability;
- effectiveness.

Design model

We were to follow the following design phases:

- analysis of needs;
- development of design specifications and product requirements;
- complete overall design;
- carry out formative evaluation;
- revise;
- trial;
- revise;
- test, potentially revise and implement.

We decided to formulate product specifications based on needs and wishes coming from the stakeholders themselves, who, in this case, were those who would operationalise the new curriculum in their teaching practice and learning process. Early versions and concepts were to be discussed with their users, evaluated, improved and revised across trials. This phase was also to legitimise the choices made. Prototypes would be tested with language teachers and pupils, and then improved, to eventually arrive at the final product.

Design process

In January, 2008, we held an online interview with language teachers and school managers in order to make an inventory of problems and needs. The outcomes, together with our experiences built up during training sessions at several schools, provided us with enough information to make a rough design of the site map. We started discussions with the webdesigner and the webmaster for the development of a lay-out suitable for the purpose of the site, and for adequate applications for the interactive parts. In the second half of 2008, we started developing the content of the site. This phase has not been totally accomplished yet because of the complexity of the site. The teacher profile is nearly finished and has been online since September, 2009.

During early design phases, evaluative sessions with our Master Plan partners were organised, which allowed us to fine-tune the content.

In the first half of 2009, formative evaluation sessions were organised in two ways:

- a) First of all, a pilot CEFR implementation project started at the beginning of 2009. About 20 secondary schools participate in the project, which will last till the end of 2010. Each school offers a specific context and has formulated specific needs. They all share the same target - the improvement of foreign language learning achievements through the use of the CEFR. The training sessions, both the introductory ones and those on site, constituted perfect occasions to test and revise some parts of the website and some of the tools.
- b) In June 2009, a formative evaluation session with language teachers took place.

Participants were asked to evaluate the website with regards to both general and specific aspects like ease of navigation use, relevance, consistence and usability of the information offered, and perceived usability and effectiveness of the teaching tools. A checklist listing the key issues was developed to help structure the process. The outcomes of the evaluation session were used to revise and improve the site content. Similar sessions will be organised in 2009 and 2010 with representatives of the other stakeholders the site is meant for - school managers, pupils, parents and employers. During the course of the upcoming school year, testing of the website tools will take place on a larger scale and a communication campaign will be prepared.

Conclusions: A lesson learnt and challenges to come

We are but halfway through the complex process of curriculum implementation, which will still last a few more years. Yet, we have already learnt a lesson from the first signals from the educational field. Involving those with the highest stakes, in all phases of any educational product design process, appears to be, one of the most important keys to success. Up until now, we have mainly focused on teachers. During the next phases the other four target groups will be addressed as well, using the same design methodology as described above. Acceptance and ownership are crucial to make the journey of curriculum implementation a joint one.

Another important issue must not be forgotten, that is, the importance of unambiguous communication between macro and meso/micro levels. The status of the CEFR in the Dutch official curricula and examination programmes has not been sufficiently formalised yet. Official programmes are still very generally worded and do not provide CEFR-related standards on which curriculum developers and teachers can base their goals and plans. At the moment, both can only be based upon the indications contained in the handouts. On the one hand, more evidence-based data about attainability of target levels are needed; on the other hand, the status of the CEFR will be crucial for successful implementation in the Dutch education system. Otherwise, the CEFR levels will remain non-committal in the teachers' perception.

We see this as one of the challenges that is awaiting us in the near future.

We are grateful to Jan van den Akker and Anne Beeker for their useful feedback.

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The position of Modern Languages within Scotland's new Curriculum for Excellence

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—Rosemary Delaney and Brian Templeton

Abstract

Since the turn of the century Scotland has embarked on an ambitious reform of the school curriculum from age 3 to 18 known as a Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The main purpose of the reform is to modernise the school curriculum and ensure that it is fit for purpose in the 21st century. CfE recognises that the new century will continue to be characterised by rapid change in all aspects of life. If our young citizens of the future are to be equipped to deal with such rapid change, then the education system needs to concentrate on developing the necessary skills for learning, skills for work and skills for life, while ensuring that the content of teaching and learning is still relevant. CfE sets out as guiding principles that the aim of education should be to develop young learners who exhibit the following four capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. In doing so, CfE begins to shift the emphasis from an outcomes driven curriculum to a skills driven model and challenges each subject area within the traditional curriculum to justify its place in the new curriculum in terms of how that subject contributes to developing the four capacities in our young learners.

This article considers the implications for Modern Languages of such a shift in emphasis from content and outcomes to skills and learning experiences. The article describes the opportunities that CfE offers practitioners to reinvigorate the teaching and learning of Modern Languages and also shows how Modern Languages can contribute to achieving the aims of CfE. In doing so, it considers how progression can be achieved particularly around the transition from primary to secondary and highlights the unique contribution that Modern Languages can make to developing literacy skills, active citizenship and communicative competence in our young learners.

Introduction

Since the turn of the century Scotland has embarked on an ambitious reform of the school curriculum from age 3 to 18 known as a Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The main purpose of the reform is to modernise the school curriculum and ensure that it is fit for purpose in the 21st century. When introducing CfE, the then Minister for Education, Peter Peacock described the reform as: “..... *the most comprehensive modernisation programme in our schools for a generation*” (Scottish Executive, 2004).

This chapter outlines the key aims, stages and features of this radical reform of the school curriculum and highlights the implications of CfE for languages policy in Scotland. The chapter discusses the impact of CfE on the teaching and learning of Modern Languages and also considers how Modern Languages can contribute to achieving the aims of CfE by helping our young people to become:

- successful learners, who can reflect on how they have acquired and learned their first language and how this can assist them in further language learning
- confident individuals, who can talk with others or deliver presentations in their new language

- effective contributors, who can work in individual, paired and group situations, and establish and maintain contact with other speakers of the target language
- responsible citizens, who have a growing awareness of life in another society and of the issues facing citizens in the countries where their new language is spoken.

CfE Modern languages Framework offers an opportunity to further develop learning and teaching experiences that are relevant and enjoyable. This includes making effective use of information and communication technology to enhance teaching and learning, and providing real-life contexts that motivate children and young people and help them to see a purpose to their language learning.

Partnership working is an important element in CfE and should include all those who can contribute to delivery of the experiences and outcomes and development of the four capacities. This will include, for example: further education colleges, Skills Development Scotland, youth work staff, health professionals, parents and employers.

This chapter also considers the opportunities and challenges that CfE presents to practitioners in both the primary and secondary sectors and concludes by discussing the challenges to be addressed in achieving an appropriate balance between the national direction of language policy and local autonomy in its implementation.

Background to change

Timeline of the process

2002 – National Debate on Education

A consultation to determine what was working well and what needed to change in school education. Teachers and educationists recognised that there was a need to offer more engaging and relevant experiences to ensure that Scotland’s children and young people were equipped for life and work in a globalised society.

2003 - Curriculum Review Group established

The Curriculum Review Group was established by Scottish Executive Ministers to identify the key principles to be applied in the curriculum redesign for ages 3-18. It looked at evidence of practice, research, international comparisons and global, local, economic and social changes.

2004 - A Curriculum for Excellence

*A Curriculum for Excellence*¹ was published in November 2004 as a result of the work of the Curriculum Review Group, together with the *Ministerial response*.² This provided explicit aims for education in Scotland and principles for curriculum redesign. The Curriculum Review Programme Board was established.

¹ For more information on Curriculum for Excellence see: http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/publications/a/publication_tcm4509419.asp?strReferringChannel=curriculumforexcellence

² For more information on the Ministerial response see: http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/publications/a/publication_tcm4509417.asp?strReferringChannel=curriculumforexcellence

2005 - Research and review process

Research was commissioned and practitioners drawn from different sectors of education and from around the country were seconded to Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) to review existing guidelines and research findings, hold focus groups with practitioners and begin the process of developing simpler, prioritised curriculum guidelines.

2006 - Progress and Proposals published and Building the Curriculum series begun

The *Progress and Proposals document*³ set out key features of the new curriculum. The *Building the Curriculum*⁴ publications provide guidance on how different aspects of the curriculum contribute to the aims of Curriculum for Excellence.

2007 to 2008 - Draft experiences and outcomes published

The draft experiences and outcomes were published in stages. Teachers and all those with an interest in children and young people's learning were encouraged to reflect on the draft experiences and outcomes and feed their comments back through an extensive engagement process. Findings were also fed back from trialling activities and from focus groups

2008 – Analysis of feedback and responses

All feedback was analysed by the University of Glasgow and actions were identified to respond to the issues raised. There was then a process of refinement, further development, consultation and quality assurance.

2009 - Publication of the new curriculum guidelines

'Curriculum for Excellence embodies a new way of working. It recognises that sustained and meaningful improvement should, to a significant extent, be shaped and owned by those who will put it into practice.'

Improving Scottish Education,⁵ HMIe, 2009

The Key Features of CfE

The Values

The changes proposed by Curriculum for Excellence should lead to improved quality of learning and teaching and increased attainment and achievement for all children and young people in Scotland, including those who need additional support in their learning.

Curriculum for Excellence is underpinned by the **four values** inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament - wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. These words have helped define values for Scottish society, and should be used to form the basis of an inclusive curriculum, which will help young people in Scotland define their own position on matters of social justice and personal and collective responsibility.

³ For more information on the Progress and Proposals document see http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/publications/a/publication_tcm518034.asp?strReferringChannel=curriculumforexcellence

⁴ For more information on building the curriculum see <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/buildingthecurriculum/guidance/index.asp>

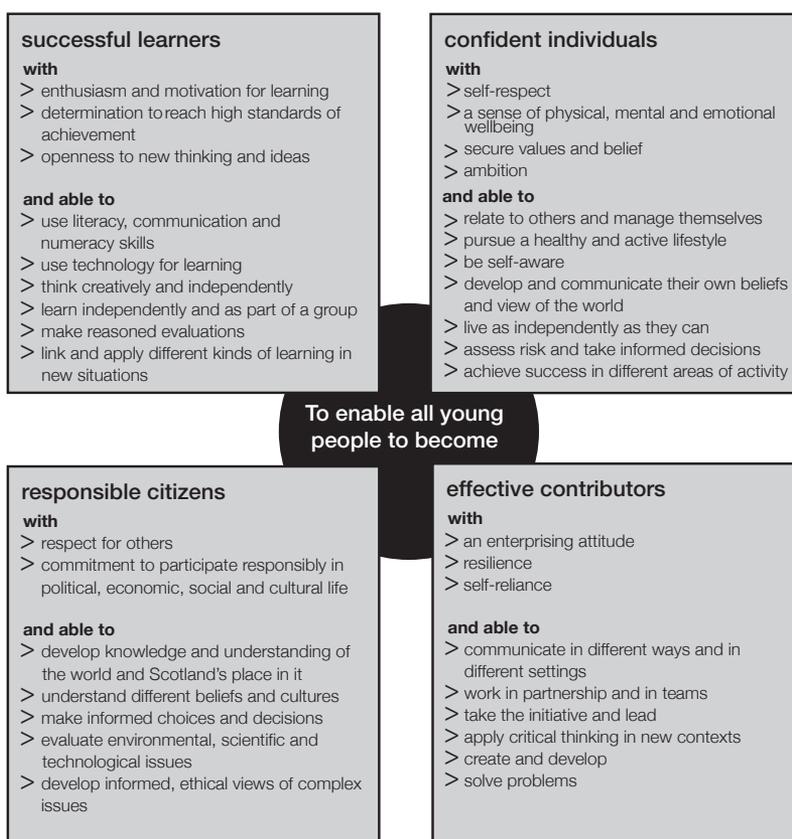
⁵ For more information on Improving Scottish Education see <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/background/caseforchange/hmie.asp>

The Purpose: The Four Capacities

The purpose of Curriculum for Excellence is to ensure that all the children and young people of Scotland develop the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work, now and in the future. These are summed up in the detailed wording of the four capacities,⁶ identified to enable each child or young person to be a **successful learner**, a **confident individual**, a **responsible citizen** and an **effective contributor**.

Each aspect of the new curriculum has to demonstrate how the experiences and outcomes in that area of the curriculum build in the attributes and capabilities which support the development of the four capacities. The expanded statements of the four capacities also form a very useful focus for planning choices and next steps in learning.

Figure 1 The Four Capacities



(Scottish Government, 2008)

⁶ For more information on The Four Capacities see: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/curriculumoverview/aims/fourcapacities.asp>

Learner Entitlements

In order to develop these four capacities, every child and young person will have **learner entitlements** and should:

- experience a traditionally broad Scottish curriculum that develops **skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work**, with a sustained focus on literacy and numeracy, that encourages an active, healthy and environmentally sustainable lifestyle and that builds an appreciation of Scotland and its place in the world
- benefit from learning and teaching that strikes a better balance between equipping them with the skills for passing exams and skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work
- have their learning and achievements recognised by an assessment system that supports the curriculum rather than leads it and ensures that their transition into qualifications is smooth.

Principles for Curriculum Design

To deliver a curriculum which meets the needs of young people growing up in a world of rapid change it is necessary to identify **principles for curriculum design**, which must be taken into account when planning the learning experiences that young people will embrace as they progress through the stages of their learning. Although all principles should apply at any one stage, the principles will have different emphases as a young person learns and develops.

Challenge and enjoyment: Children and young people should find their learning challenging, engaging and motivating. The curriculum should encourage high aspirations and ambitions for all.

Breadth: The curriculum should be organised so that all children and young people will learn and develop through a variety of contexts within both the classroom and other aspects of school life.

Progression: Children and young people should experience continuous progression in their learning from 3 to 18 within a single curriculum framework and be able to progress at a rate which meets their needs and aptitudes. Each stage should build upon earlier knowledge and achievements.

Depth: There should be opportunities for children to develop their full capacity for different types of thinking and learning, drawing different strands of learning together, and exploring and achieving more advanced levels of understanding.

Personalisation and choice: The curriculum should respond to individual needs and support particular aptitudes and talents giving each child and young person increasing opportunities for exercising responsible personal choice.

Coherence: Taken as a whole, children and young people's learning activities should combine to form a coherent experience with clear links between the different aspects of their learning.

Relevance: Children and young people should understand the purposes of their activities.

They should see the value of what they are learning and its relevance to their lives, present and future.

Curriculum for Excellence achievement framework

To ensure an appropriate level of challenge and progress at key stages in a young person's learning from age 3 to 18, a framework comprising five levels with progression to qualifications described under the senior phase has been established. The expectations for each level take account of what children can achieve with appropriate pace and challenge and teachers will constantly be observing and judging progress using a broad repertoire of approaches. As part of this overall approach to assessment they will need to take stock through broad summative judgements when they believe that a child has a secure grasp of a significant body of learning.

Table 1 Levels with progression

Level	Stage
Early	The pre-school years and P1, or later for some.
First	To the end of P4, but earlier or later for some.
Second	To the end of P7, but earlier or later for some.
Third and Fourth	S1 to S3, but earlier for some. The fourth level broadly equates to Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level 4. The fourth level experiences and outcomes are intended to provide possibilities for choice and young people's programmes will not include all of the fourth level outcomes.
Senior phase	S4 to S6, and college or other means of study.

Totality of Experiences: How learning is organised

In CfE the curriculum is interpreted in its widest sense to include all of the experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, both within and without the classroom.

Ethos and life of the school as a community

The starting point for learning is a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust based upon shared values across the school community.

Children and young people should be encouraged to contribute to the life and work of the school and, from the earliest stages, be provided with opportunities to participate responsibly in decision making, to contribute as leaders and role models, to offer support and service to others and to play an active part in putting the values of the school community into practice.

Curriculum Areas and Subjects

Establishments and partnerships have the freedom to think creatively about how the experiences and outcomes might be organised and planned for in ways which encourage deep, sustained learning and which meet the needs of their children and young people.

However, the curriculum areas and discrete subjects remain the key organisers for setting out the experiences and outcomes, particularly in secondary school, as they provide an important and familiar structure for knowledge and offer a context for specialists to inspire, stretch and motivate the learner. Learning in each curriculum area and subject has been reviewed and updated to emphasise the contributions it can make to developing the four capacities.

To provide a device for ensuring that learning takes place across different contexts the range of experiences and outcomes have been grouped into recognisable curricular areas:

- health and wellbeing
- languages
- mathematics
- sciences
- social studies
- expressive arts
- technologies
- religious and moral education

Interdisciplinary Learning

The curriculum should also include space for learning beyond subject boundaries, so that learners can make connections between different areas of learning. This can be achieved by means of interdisciplinary studies, based upon groupings of experiences and outcomes from within and across curriculum areas, and through the creation of opportunities for personal achievement where schools work closely with partner organisations and the wider community.

Opportunities for Personal Achievement

Pupils need opportunities for achievements both in the classroom and beyond, giving them a sense of satisfaction and building motivation, resilience and confidence. All establishments need to plan to offer opportunities for achievement and to provide the support and encouragement which will enable young people to step forward to undertake activities which they find challenging.

This is one of the key areas where schools need to work closely with voluntary youth organisations⁷ to help young people access information and opportunities and make their voices heard.

Important themes and areas that are the responsibility of all

The following areas of learning are so central to the aims of CfE and to developing the four capacities in young learners that they are considered to be the responsibility of all teachers whatever their subject specialism may be:

Health and Wellbeing: Learning through health and wellbeing promotes confidence, independent thinking and positive attitudes and dispositions. Because of this, it is the responsibility of every teacher to contribute to learning and development in this area (Scottish Executive, 2006).

⁷ For more information about partnership working see: <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/buildingthecurriculum/partnership/index.asp>

Literacy: Competence and confidence in literacy is essential for progress in all areas of the curriculum. Because of this, all teachers have responsibility for promoting language and literacy development. Every teacher needs to find opportunities to encourage young people to explain their thinking, debate their ideas and read and write at a level which will help them to develop their language skills further (Scottish Executive, 2006).

Numeracy: With an increased emphasis upon numeracy for all young people, every teacher will need to plan to revisit and consolidate numeracy skills throughout schooling (Scottish Executive, 2006).

Other important themes such as Enterprise, Citizenship, Sustainable Development, International Education and Creativity need to be developed in a range of contexts and learning relating to these themes is built in to the experiences and outcomes across the curriculum areas.

Modern Languages within a Curriculum for Excellence

Curriculum for Excellence is the means by which the school curriculum in Scotland is being modernised and improved. This is made clear in the most recent report published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) 'Improving Scottish Education' in 2009: *'It is clear that the future will require a population with the confidence and skills to meet the challenges posed by fast and far-reaching change. Scotland's future economic prosperity requires an education system within which the population as a whole will develop the kind of knowledge, skills and attributes which will equip them personally, socially and economically to thrive in the 21st century. It also demands standards of attainment and achievement which match these needs and strengthen Scotland's position internationally'* (HMIE, 2009).

The process by which this major improvement is to be made depends heavily on the willing involvement of those practitioners who must implement the new curriculum. CfE provides guidance for teachers on the level of achievement expected of most learners at different stages in their learning career, while allowing teachers flexibility in designing motivating teaching and learning experiences that will lead to successful attainment of the outcomes.

In the remainder of the chapter we now turn to consider how the modern languages profession in Scotland is responding to the opportunities and challenges that CfE offers. CfE offers the modern languages profession a very timely opportunity to review approaches to learning and teaching in order to increase motivation and improve the level of achievement for learners. Above all it offers them the opportunity to create a framework that meets the needs of pupils beginning their study of a modern language relatively late in their primary school career⁸ and which takes account of the way in which a modern language is learned by beginners.

⁸ The emphasis in modern languages is on ensuring that each learner achieves an acceptable level of proficiency in the language. This level of proficiency is linked to Basic User Level of the CEFR. The national expectation is that almost all young people study modern languages to the third level as part of their general education for our young people. This may be achieved in different ways:

'Such flexibility will result in a more varied pattern of curriculum structures to reflect local needs and circumstances.'
(Building the Curriculum 3)

The CfE framework in modern languages provides an opportunity for pupils' attainment to be recognised at the end of P7, S1 and at the end of S3. It aims to establish a coherent learning continuum from P6-S3 (without inhibiting the potential for variation and flexibility depending on local circumstances) achievable by the vast majority of pupils and which leads to a minimum level of proficiency in key tasks and language skills (without preventing more able pupils from exceeding the minimum levels). In doing so it is intended to:

- Link and justify the study of modern languages with regard to the four key capacities of a Curriculum for Excellence
- Promote a positive attitude to language learning so that pupils retain their initial enthusiasm for learning that is purposeful, progressive and enjoyable
- Develop effective language learning skills so that pupils can learn how to learn a language more effectively at the primary and secondary stages and throughout life
- Highlight effective teaching and learning programmes and effective teaching and learning strategies, making use of ICT to establish links with real pupils in real schools in countries where the target language is spoken in order to provide realistic and relevant contexts for the pupils' learning.

The framework seeks to play to the strengths of both primary and secondary practitioners.

In particular in the primary stage the framework intends to:

- Establish in P6/7 a solid basis for the lifelong learning of modern languages
- Encourage pupils to reflect on how they have acquired and learned their first language and how this relates to their study of a new language, by identifying both similar and distinctive features of the two languages (pronunciation / Knowledge about Language (KAL) / writing conventions etc.)
- Develop competence in all four language skills while recognising the importance of listening for beginners of a language
- Promote enjoyment through games, stories and songs and by promoting awareness of the social, cultural and geographical features of countries where the modern language is spoken.

In particular in the secondary stage the framework intends to:

- Ensure a smooth and coherent transition from P7 into S1, so that the secondary experience builds not only on what has been covered but also on the teaching strategies used
- Encourage wide use of Assessment is for Learning approaches (AifL) to develop further the pupils' reflection on how to learn effectively a modern language and how to improve the level of performance
- Create meaningful and relevant contexts for learning including the opportunity to work with other subject areas to develop cross-curricular projects
- Explore the concept of a "Languages Passport/Portfolio" as a more flexible way of accrediting learners' achievements by outlining the areas of study, the tasks achieved and the levels attained.

Response to Modern Languages Proposals

There has been a very positive response to the experiences and outcomes from modern languages practitioners who are clearly aware of the valuable contribution that modern languages can make to the aims of CfE and to the 'broad general education' to which all learners are entitled.

The Introductory Statements

The introductory statements for modern languages highlight three key aims of learning modern languages which make a unique contribution to the aims of Curriculum for Excellence: the interconnected nature of languages, active citizenship and communicative competence.

I gain a deeper understanding of my first language and appreciate the richness and interconnected nature of languages (Scottish Government, 2009).

It is important to capitalise on the fact that by the time they begin their study of a modern language, learners will have acquired their home language(s) and will have begun to study English in a school context. The learning of a new language provides the opportunity for teachers of modern languages to help learners to reflect on their first language revisiting, improving and understanding more securely aspects of literacy in it whilst actively seeking comparisons between the features of their first and second languages.

I enhance my understanding and enjoyment of other cultures and of my own and gain insights into other ways of thinking and other views of the world (Scottish Government, 2009).

The study of a modern language provides children and young people with a means of communicating directly with people from different cultures, enhancing their understanding and enjoyment of other cultures and of their own. They gain insights into other ways of thinking and other views of the world and therefore develop a much richer understanding of active citizenship.

I develop skills that I can use and enjoy in work and leisure throughout my life (Scottish Government, 2009).

One of the key aims of modern languages teaching is to develop young people's 'communicative competence' so that they are able to use and enjoy the language effectively in real situations and for a range of relevant purposes in work and leisure throughout their life. The relevance of what pupils learn is central to the aims of CfE and the Modern Languages levels have been linked to those being developed as part of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) so that the level of competence achieved by learners will have a European-wide equivalence. The CEFR comprehensively describes what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and defines levels of proficiency, which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning on a lifelong basis.

Challenges

Although modern languages teachers are supportive of the CfE proposals there remain some important concerns and issues:

Staff in both primary and secondary stages seeks further support and guidance on the structure of the curriculum and on assessment as the CfE Programme develops

- Increasing the confidence and competence of primary teachers of modern languages in the foreign language remains an area for support and development
- Many secondary teachers still see the need to cover course content and to work towards national exams as a barrier to adopting the more active and collaborative form of learning encouraged by CfE
- Secondary teachers stress the need for further detail and exemplification of the standard expected of pupils at third and fourth level

It is intended to allay these concerns in the next phase of CfE (2009-2011), which aims to provide further exemplification and support for the implementation of CfE across the 3-15 age range. A range of exemplification is planned which will make particular use of on-line support and information platforms for teachers, including GLOW, the national intranet for education, which encourages the setting up of on-line communities of enquiry and allows pupils and teachers to share nationally their experiences and resources, offer opinions and learn from each other.

As CfE moves into the implementation phase for 3-15, there are some important issues still to be resolved. These concern the concept of teacher professionalism and the desire for a national framework but with local variation in its implementation.

Teacher autonomy v Prescription

CfE seeks to enhance the professionalism of teachers and to allow teachers more freedom to use their creativity to design teaching and learning contexts that best suit the needs of their pupils. As a result, there is often a tension between the desire for teacher autonomy on the one hand and the desire for clear direction on the other. The tension is seen most clearly in the response to the request from practitioners for exemplification to support the implementation of CfE. The position supported by the government is to limit both the quantity and type of exemplification so that CfE is not seen to be offering templates nor prescription that would inhibit the creativity and flexibility of local authorities, schools and teachers. While accepting the rationale for such a position, many teachers still seek high levels of support, including time for teachers to develop and share resources.

National framework implemented at a local level

It has long been considered a strength of the Scottish educational system that it is a national system locally administered. However, such an approach brings with it tensions similar to those outlined above in terms of prescription versus autonomy and these tensions are particularly evident in the following areas of modern languages 'policy'.

Training of Primary Staff

The challenges involved in taking forward a national initiative, while allowing for local variation in its implementation, can be seen most clearly in the position of modern languages in the primary schools (MLPS). As a result of positive evaluation of a National Pilot project, the decision was taken in 1993 to extend the teaching of modern languages to all primary schools in Scotland and a National Training Programme was devised to give volunteer primary teachers the linguistic skills and the teaching methodology needed to introduce a modern language into the primary curriculum. However, the original National Training Programme of 27 days has become diluted and variable, as the responsibility for

training was devolved to local authorities. Since 2007, when the traditional ‘ring-fenced’ funding specifically supporting MLPS was removed, the level of training has been subject to even greater variation.

However, some educators would suggest that in order to achieve the modern languages aims within CfE the issue of training of primary teachers needs to be addressed and that instead of relying on volunteers, all primary teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to contribute to the teaching of a modern language. If a greater emphasis is to be placed on making connections between the first language (L1) and learning a second language (L2), then it becomes possible that as part of the language programme for all students in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) this relationship is explored and the difference between language acquisition and language learning is made clear. Proficiency in the foreign language could then be addressed at two levels. All primary teachers could be trained to a minimum level of competence which would allow all teachers to ‘immerse’ their own pupils in basic classroom language. Primary teachers with a specialism in modern languages could undertake additional training (perhaps in the form of a Postgraduate Certificate), which would concentrate on more advanced language content and modern languages methodology. Such an approach to the training issue involving both ITE and CPD would ensure that all learners have daily exposure to the foreign language.

Compulsion v Entitlement

A similar tension can be seen in the debate as to whether the study of modern languages should be compulsory for all pupils and if so for how long. The position in Scotland since 1989 had been that the study of a foreign language was recommended for all pupils from P6 – S4. In December 2000, a major national review of modern languages education in Scottish schools published its report entitled *Citizens of a Multilingual World* (Scottish Executive, 2000).

Within the report, it stated that children would be entitled, as opposed to required, to learn a foreign language in the first four years of secondary school. Local authorities interpreted the entitlement in different ways and this has resulted in a decline in the number of pupils continuing their study of a foreign language to the end of S4.

While *Citizens of a Multilingual World* stipulates the amount of time pupils should spend studying a modern language and some of the learning experiences which should be provided for pupils, it does not define a minimum acceptable level of proficiency in a modern language, nor does it make clear what proportion of pupils should achieve a certain level of proficiency by any particular stage.

A recent report from HMIe, ‘Progress in addressing the recommendations of *Citizens of a Multilingual World*’ discussing the effects of the entitlement debate, concludes: *‘Consideration should be given to moving away from a definition based on the time spent on study, towards one which is focused on the level of proficiency ultimately achieved, including a minimum acceptable level of competence which almost all pupils should attain’* (HMIe, 2005).

In doing so it foresees the approach adopted for modern languages within CfE and the desirability of linking the CfE levels of proficiency to those being developed as part of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The proposals for

modern languages in CfE provide the framework for a successful learning experience leading to a level of competency in the target language, which equates approximately to the top of Basic User level within the CEFR. It also presupposes that most pupils would experience the study of a modern language from P6 to S3 as an integral part of each pupil's entitlement to a *'broad general education'* (Scottish Government, 2008). If this is to be implemented successfully, many practitioners, including the Scottish Association of Language Teachers (SALT), feel that the Scottish Government and local authorities must agree on a national strategy and on how much local variation there may be in deviating from it.

The Scottish Government has stated its support for Modern Languages as an area of national priority and there have been several important initiatives in the secondary stages, which confirm this policy, including the introduction of the Scottish Language Baccalaureate and Modern Languages for Work Purposes Units in ten languages, both available from August 2009, as are new national qualifications in Chinese Languages at Higher and Advanced Higher levels, completing the suite of national qualifications at all levels in these languages. The Scottish Government has also launched 8 Confucius Classroom hubs serving primary and secondary schools in 13 local authorities. These innovations contribute greatly to the international dimension of Modern Languages and have been successfully implemented, offering encouragement as to what further innovations can be achieved, particularly in the early stages.

Conclusion

The development of modern languages within CfE has been welcomed as providing an opportunity and a framework *'to reinvigorate the teaching and learning of modern languages in Scotland'* (University of Glasgow 2008). It provides practitioners with a clear rationale for the inclusion of modern languages as an essential element in the curriculum of the future. In particular, it highlights how the study of a modern language plays a central role in the development of literacy skills and can also contribute to the development of numeracy skills through, for example, learning and exploring the use of the number system in a new language. It also shows how learning a modern language provides opportunities for interdisciplinary work by providing a global dimension to a variety of curriculum areas and, particularly, to the areas of active citizenship and cultural awareness. The framework for modern languages also puts an emphasis on learning experiences which require the active involvement of the learner, which maximise the potential of ICT and which ensure that we develop course content relevant to young people in the 21st century.

The CfE framework and rationale also offer policy makers the opportunity to agree a national strategy for the teaching and learning of modern languages from age 3-18, concentrating initially on how modern languages are an essential component of a *'broad general education'* (Scottish Government, 2009). However, this article also highlights some important issues that need to be resolved for this strategy to be agreed and implemented and it is hoped that progress in resolving these will be forthcoming, through discussions between the Scottish Government, which has responsibility for setting the policy framework, and local authorities, which have responsibility for implementing it in such a way as to meet the needs of their local area.

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Language policy and education strategies in Switzerland

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Abstract

Switzerland, a multilingual and multicultural country where four national languages and an assortment of migrant languages are spoken, has developed a national language policy. In 2004 the cantonal ministers of education endorsed a comprehensive language policy strategy and a language education action plan. The strategy is designed to strengthen the language skills of native speakers of the national languages as well as the language proficiency of students from foreign countries who speak a foreign language and also addresses foreign language instruction. According to the strategic guidelines for compulsory education, students begin learning foreign languages earlier than before and new didactic methods are used. Research has shown that most children enjoy learning second languages and achieve good test scores. However, studies have also revealed some major challenges concerning basic and in-service training programmes for teachers.

The language situation in Switzerland

Switzerland has four official national languages (German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic) that are spoken in four linguistic regions. These linguistic regions are, for the most part, congruous with the official cantonal boundaries, but there are a few cantons where two or even three languages are considered an “official language”. Linguistically speaking, Switzerland’s 26 cantons can be grouped as follows: There are 17 German-speaking cantons, 4 French-speaking cantons, one Italian-speaking canton and 3 bilingual cantons (French/German) as well as one trilingual canton (German, Italian and Rhaeto-Romanic). The latest census (2000) produced the following primary language distribution:

German	63.7%
French	20.4%
Italian	6.5%
Rhaeto-Romanic	0.5%
Other languages	8.9%

The languages in the three major linguistic regions (German, French and Italian-speaking regions) are the same as the languages spoken in the countries just across the border from these three regions, although all three linguistic regions are also home to a multitude of dialects besides the given standard language(s); in some cases, these dialects are quite different to the standard language and they may even differ considerably compared to other dialects within the same region.

The federal government’s commitment to Switzerland’s quadrilingualism and to policies that promote understanding and interaction between the country’s language communities is embodied in the Swiss constitution. This commitment is spelled out in the “language law” (*Sprachengesetz*). It was passed by parliament in 2007 and is scheduled to take effect in 2010.

As Switzerland is also a country of immigration, a relatively large percentage of the population does not have one of the four national languages as their mother tongue. Approximately 9% of the country's population has a foreign native tongue and among those, there are several sizable population groups that speak Serbian or Croatian (1.5%), Albanian (1.3%), Portuguese (1.2%), Spanish (1%), English (1%) or Turkish (0.6%).

Language policy at the federal and cantonal level

Switzerland's multilingualism and geographic location in the heart of Europe, as well as the two trends of globalisation and increasing mobility, all place special demands on the foreign language skills of its population. Just because Switzerland is a multilingual country, does not mean that its population is automatically multilingual. Competence in the various (national) languages must in fact be acquired and the educational system plays a major role in this respect. As different government bodies are responsible for different areas of the education system in Switzerland,¹ the aforementioned language law enjoins the confederation and the cantons to ensure that the language used in classrooms (the standard language) is cultivated at all levels of the school system and promotes multilingualism among the learners and teachers within the scope of their respective powers. At the end of compulsory schooling, students should, at a minimum, have a good command of a second national language and another foreign language. A scientific competency centre is also to be established to promote multilingualism (language law of October 5, 2007).

The Federal Council authorised the National Research Programme "Language Diversity and Linguistic Competence in Switzerland" (NRP 56) to augment its efforts in connection with the language law. This research programme is designed to create a scientific foundation to facilitate the implementation of Swiss language policy. More specifically, it examines the legal and political setting pertinent to language policy and will provide insights beneficial to linguistic competence and also examine the interaction between language and identity.²

Language teaching in compulsory education – the strategy of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education

In March 2004, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) ratified a common strategy for language instruction at the compulsory school level. The main objectives of this strategy are to:

- broadly improve language acquisition (also in students' primary language);
- make better use of the potential of teaching language at an early age;
- respect the country's multilingualism;
- remain competitive in a European context.

¹ The cantons are responsible for compulsory education; the confederation for vocational schools.

² Further information on the National Research Programme "Language Diversity and Linguistic Competence in Switzerland" can be found at www.nfp56.ch

A medium-term goal in foreign language instruction is to teach students a second language by their third year of compulsory schooling at the latest and a third language by their fifth year of schooling at the latest; these additional languages are basically a second national language and English. Students should be equally proficient in both of these foreign languages at the end of compulsory schooling.

The implementation of this policy decision on language teaching is coordinated at the regional level and the cantons are collaborating on in-service teacher training programmes as well as on research and development activities. The agreement reached by the cantons is based on the so-called “comprehensive language concept” that the EDK commissioned at the end of the 1990s. This concept acknowledged the primary importance of language as a medium of thinking, learning and expression and the fact that quadrilingual Switzerland is actually a country where more than four languages are spoken due to migration. It also acknowledged the growing significance of multilingualism in a globalised world. This concept – drawing on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – included foreign language acquisition goals and encouraged cantons to cultivate the languages spoken within the student body (also the migration languages). Another novel approach in this concept was the recommendation to introduce foreign language instruction to school curricula early on and to embrace innovative didactic measures (language awareness, integrated language didactics, bilingual instruction, etc.). Several aspects of the language policy decision and the underlying language concept will be pointed out and presented in somewhat greater detail in the following sections of this paper.

Before continuing, however, it is noted that the reading results from the first round of PISA in 2000 drew greater attention to and enlivened the discussion about language education policy in Switzerland.

PISA 2000 and the action plan on the follow-up measures

The results of the OECD assessment within the scope of PISA 2000 did not produce the same shock waves in Switzerland as they did in Germany, but they nevertheless revealed a need to take action in the area of reading literacy. The percentage of young adults with insufficient reading skills (at or below level 1) was relatively high at 20%. It was also apparent that reading competency was highly correlated with social background and gender, thus giving rise to the assumption that the Swiss school system has not been successful enough in imparting reading skills to disadvantaged children and adolescents (especially male adolescents) to ensure that they are adequately prepared for life after school.

After the assessment results were published and broadly discussed in the media, the cantonal education directors commissioned numerous in-depth studies and, in the summer of 2003, developed an action plan containing “PISA 2000” follow-up measures. Five areas of action were defined, two of which entailed the strengthening of language skills in a narrower sense. The other three areas of action focus on preschool and school entry periods, school quality and after-school activities and supervision. The first two areas of action mentioned entail

- *strengthening the language skills of all learners and*
- *strengthening the language skills of children and young people with weak learning backgrounds.*

The language promotion measures for all learners are intended to strengthen language skills, reading skills in particular, in all school subjects and at all school levels; to direct more attention toward the issue of language acquisition in basic and continuing teacher education programmes; and to make promotion of language development and reading skills an integral element of schoolhouse culture. Cultivating an enthusiasm for language and motivating students to read were also key objectives. Language and reading acquisition are viewed as tasks that must be addressed by the entire education system and by schools as a whole – and also as tasks that can certainly be approached in a fun and enjoyable way.

In the action plan, language acquisition measures for children and adolescents with adverse learning backgrounds are to be introduced early on and children with a foreign mother tongue are to be offered support in the form of specific inputs throughout their schooling to enhance their command of the language of instruction. Schools and classes with a large number of foreign-speaking students are advised to provide additional special resources and teachers should be given better training to help them deal with cultural and social heterogeneity. Greater collaboration with parents is also recommended.

The action plan stimulated – where this had not already happened – language and reading promotion efforts at various levels of the education system (and elsewhere). Examples of such activities are singled out and briefly explained in the following sections.

Examples of language and reading acquisition activities

Family literacy and the promotion of reading acquisition in the early years

The programmes modelled on international examples that raise family awareness of reading acquisition issues are not directly connected with the school system as they focus instead on the early years of childhood. These programmes have been launched by organisations that have traditionally been engaged in reading promotion, for example, the Swiss Institute for Children and Youth Media (*Schweizerische Institut für Kinder und Jugendmedien*, SIKJM), which launched a project called “Share a story” (*Schenk mir eine Geschichte*) in which parents with a migration background and low educational levels are encouraged to tell stories to their children (in their native language) and to show them storybooks and to read stories to them. This project received an Alpha Award in 2008 from the Committee Against Illiteracy established by the Swiss UNESCO Commission.

The same institute, in collaboration with a library media organisation (*Bibliomedia Schweiz*), has also launched a project called Book Start (*Buchstart*) with the aim of giving all newborn children their very first book and providing their parents with some tips on promoting language development.

Another project launched by SIKJM entails training courses for reading animators who motivate children in the early years to explore the world of books and inform their caregivers about language and reading acquisition.

Language acquisition during preschool

In preschool, which children in most cantons are required to attend for at least one year,

the language development process of children is considered an important objective in a general sense. Besides taking an amusing approach to language and playfully introducing children to the world of fairy tales, storybooks and written language, specific training exercises that enhance children's phonological awareness, for example, or address language development problems are used. Measures are also employed to support children with a foreign native tongue and to facilitate the systematic introduction of the standard language in the preschool setting. A so-called diglossic situation exists in Switzerland, especially in German-speaking Switzerland, where local dialects are firmly established as the spoken language at home and in informal situations. Consequently, the cantons attach importance to enhancing standard language competency as early as preschool.

Reading acquisition in the classroom and schoolhouse

Reading is not only a “technique” that children are introduced to in their early school years and then learn once and for all – reading is a skill that must be continuously developed and expanded over many years. Reading should also be firmly anchored as a cultural practice. Besides practising reading skills and strategies, a wide range of reading animation actions has been conceived. Schools and teachers are encouraged to promote expressive language abilities and the reading and writing skills of the learners, not only in language classes themselves but in all academic subject areas and not only during the early school years but at every subsequent level of schooling. A special challenge in Switzerland, especially in urban areas, is seen in the large numbers of foreign-speaking young people who often come from families with low educational attainment where reading books is usually not an everyday leisure-time activity.

Schools are well equipped to enhance reading acquisition using the resources in their own media centres or by collaborating with local libraries. Reading activities such as free reading periods, keeping diaries, organising author readings and reading nights, reading and composition contests, acting out plays and so on have become a well established part of classroom teaching. The above-mentioned organisations and institutions (Bibliomedia, SIKJM etc.) offer teachers and schools support in the form of publications (SIKJM, 2007) or informational websites. Furthermore, universities of teacher education where research and development on language and reading acquisition are conducted, incorporate their findings in the design of new teaching aids, provide continuing education courses and support teachers with online resources (for example www.antolin.ch).

Language and reading acquisition in a multicultural environment

In Switzerland, supportive measures for students who have a foreign native tongue are a well established tradition. They take the form of intensive language courses for recently immigrated children and young people, as well as additional hours of classroom instruction to strengthen and deepen their command of the standard school language. Courses in “native-country language and culture” (Kurse in heimatlicher Sprache und Kultur, HSK) that improve the learners' command of their first language as well as their awareness of their culture of origin are also widespread. These courses are offered to the various migration communities by government or non-government organisations and participation is voluntary. In several cantons with large urban areas or in communities with a high percentage of foreigners, total language concepts have been developed in which “native-country language and culture” courses are part of the curriculum and the HSK teachers

are integrated into the teaching staff of the local schools. In these schools the multitude of languages spoken by the learners are generally valorised. These children's knowledge is harnessed in didactic concepts such as the language awareness approach or they are documented in their personal language portfolio.

Language and reading acquisition in post-compulsory education

At the secondary II level, supplementary language training to help young adults improve their language, reading and writing skills is mainly offered by vocational schools. The "transition aids" for young adults, who do not immediately enter a post-compulsory education programme upon completing their compulsory schooling, also attach importance to improving language competence.

In the field of adult education there are also courses for adults that help them acquire the local language and strengthen their reading and writing skills.

Research and development on language and reading acquisition

Language and reading acquisition research and development in Switzerland have three main focal points:

1. Investigating the reasons for the relatively high numbers of young people with low reading proficiency at the end of the compulsory schooling period;
2. Interventional studies seeking, or investigating the effectiveness of, suitable training strategies and literacy promotion measures;
3. Developing diagnostic tools that enable teachers to establish children's individual learning status, and developing teaching materials and learning environments that facilitate individual promotion of literacy.

A number of results are presented very briefly in the following.

Re 1:

Key factors which have a negative impact on acquisition of reading ability include a background of social deprivation, low parental educational and literacy attainment, and belonging to school classes where a high proportion of students have the same kind of background (Moser and Berweger, 2003; Coradi Vellacott, Hollenweger, Nicolet and Wolter, 2003; Pini, Gabriel, Reith and Weiss, 2000). In the highly selective secondary level system of many Swiss cantons, classes of this kind are common in low-entry-barrier school types. In this context, it appears to be particularly difficult to provide teaching that encourages higher-levels of literacy (retrieving information, reflecting, interpreting). To compound matters, teaching staff in these types of schools are not as well qualified as counterparts in schools with higher entry-requirements (Meunier, 2007).

Re 2:

Teaching measures are shown to be particularly successful if they combine directed,

systematic training of skills, strategies and fluency in reading, and writing with open settings which appeal to the learners' interests (Aeby, 2004; Morger and Steidinger, 2005; Bertschi-Kaufmann and Schneider, 2006; Isler and Leemann, 2008). Close cooperation between schools and parents for developing and encouraging reading skills has also been shown to be useful, especially in cases where parents were trained to encourage the development of reading strategies for their child and reinforce the child's reading autonomy (Niggli, Trautwein, Schnyder, Lüdtke and Neumann, 2007). Other recommended measures include reinforcement of reading by the family (gifts of books, talking about what the child has read) and in the peer group (follow-on communication), as well as making closer connections and points of reference between leisure-time reading and school reading (Bucher, 2004). These recommendations were differentiated and underpinned a project conducted in connection with the aforementioned National Research Programme 56 (NRP 56). This project engaged with the literacy skills and literacy socialisation of young people from low-educational-attainment backgrounds (Schneider, Häcki Buhofer, Bertschi-Kaufmann, Kassis and Kronig, 2009). Schneider et al's results (2009) call into question an understanding of literacy that is still predominant in many schools, but which is far removed from the life experiences and background of underprivileged young people. Another study in the same research programme investigated the effects of intensive promotion and development of the first language among migrant children during preschool. This study showed that the intervention was successful in some respects, especially with regard to the development of first-language competence, but the effects fell short of expectations in terms of second-language (i.e., school-language) acquisition. The researchers point out that intervention at preschool was actually too late, and said that this kind of intervention should ideally take place in the early years (age 0-4 years).

Re 3:

Diagnostic tools are being developed to determine the status of language development, learning levels in reading and writing, and the literacy experiences of children. The diagnostic approach is intended to document the specific resources of children and adolescents as a basis for utilising those resources to improve attainment of learning outcomes (Niedermann and Sassenroth, 2002; Bitter Bättig, 2005). Important elements in improving attainment levels are the availability of teaching resources and materials that promote a diverse literacy culture in everyday classroom and school communities, and which take account of differing (including gender-specific) interests of children and adolescents whilst utilising a range of different media (Bertschi-Kaufmann, 2007).

Foreign language teaching

Primary level

Foreign language teaching has a strong tradition in Swiss schools, but early foreign language acquisition potentials can be further optimised on the basis of developmental psychology and brain research data. In the aforementioned official policy decision on language teaching of March 25, 2004, the cantons agreed that foreign language teaching should start no later than Year 3 and that the teaching of a second foreign language should begin from Year 5. The question as to which foreign language should be introduced first prompted a certain

amount of debate and indeed dispute at the highest political level. There are very good reasons for choosing a second national language as the first foreign language to be taught during compulsory schooling; there are equally good reasons for choosing English. Other factors to be considered include the bilingualism/trilingualism of certain cantons, as well as proximity to a French or Italian-speaking neighbouring country. The compromise eventually reached is that cantons can choose the language sequence themselves, in agreement with their region, and that learners should achieve an identical level of proficiency in the first two foreign languages by the end of the compulsory schooling period. The latest progress at primary level is presented in detail as follows:³

- In central Switzerland, the cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden and Zug (since 2004/2005) and the canton of Lucerne (since 2007/2008) start English from Year 3, and continue to teach French as from Year 5. In the canton of Uri, Italian is an option from Year 5, and French is taught from Year 7.
- Since the 2006/2007 school year, the canton of Zurich teaches English from Year 2, and continues to start teaching French in Year 5.
- The eastern Swiss cantons of Appenzell-Ausserrhoden, Glarus, Schaffhausen and St. Gallen started teaching English from Year 3 in the 2008/2009 school year. The canton of Thurgau is to follow from the 2009/2010 school year. French will continue to be taught from Year 5. In the canton of Appenzell-Innerrhoden, English has been taught from Year 3 since 2001/2002, but the teaching of French has been postponed until Year 7. In the canton of Graubünden, the first foreign language is one of the three cantonal languages and taught from Year 3 (likely from 2010/2011), and English is taught from Year 5 (likely starting 2012/2013).
- In the canton of Aargau, English has been taught from Year 3 since the 2008/2009 school year, and French is expected to be delivered from Year 6.
- The cantons of Basel-Stadt, Baselland, Solothurn and Bern, Freiburg and Wallis (German-speaking parts) have signed a cooperation agreement. While children in the cantons of Freiburg and Wallis have been learning French from Year 3 for some time now, this will apply to all the cantons involved from 2011/2012. English is scheduled to be taught from Year 5 starting in 2013/2014.
- In the French-speaking cantons of western Switzerland, German language teaching has been available starting from Year 3 for several years now. English is to be brought forward to Year 5 by 2012/2013.
- In the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino, the cantonal language concept has been implemented on a staggered basis since 2004/2005: French (Year 3-7), German (Year 7-9), English (Year 8/9).

Unlike past learning outcomes, the current objective of foreign language learning is no longer to achieve perfect language proficiency (which was rarely actually achieved in any case), rather to achieve what is called functional multilingualism. Key learning outcomes are to understand and to be understood. The curriculum is designed to expedite utilisation of the foreign language. The content is supposed to have a high practical communicative value, and the aim is for learners to speak the language as often as possible through the

³ More information about foreign-language teaching at primary level in Swiss cantons is available at www.sprachenunterricht.ch

establishment of an array of communication situations. Receptive skills (listening and reading) take priority over productive skills (speaking and writing), and the spoken language takes priority over the written (Wepf, 2009).

To take advantage of the language variety already in existence in everyday school life, concepts for sensitisation and heightened awareness for the child's own language and other languages (language awareness) are employed as early as the preschool stage and during the first few years of primary education. In this regard, Switzerland participated in the European project JALING (Janua Linguarum – The gateway of languages) with the involvement of classes from three language regions (EDK, 2005).

The aspiration is to achieve integrated language didactics, an approach that communicates general fundamentals of language acquisition and language didactics and which coordinates various different language didactics. Another means of encouraging foreign language acquisition and practical use of foreign languages is the use of immersive or learning concepts that combine language and content (CLIL = Content and Language Integrated Learning). A number of experiences, projects and evaluations employing all of these innovative approaches are available in Switzerland. However, these approaches place heavy demands on the language competence of teaching staff. To ensure that teachers achieve the requisite level, significant effort remains to be expended in the training and continual professional development of teaching staff.

Secondary level I

Until the late 1980s, foreign language acquisition did not begin until secondary level I, usually in Year 7. Hence, foreign language teaching was the sole province of a single educational level/single educator who taught a class from Year 7 through Year 9. Since the introduction of German teaching from primary Year 3 in French-speaking cantons and cantonal regions, and the introduction of French teaching from primary Year 5 in German-speaking cantons and cantonal regions in the 1990s, there has been a continuity problem in the transition from primary to secondary level. What foundations can foreign language teachers in secondary level I expect to build upon? What are the compulsory learning outcomes to be achieved by the end of primary level? Coordination of the curriculum and teaching materials is essential for inter-level continuity in foreign language teaching.

This issue was addressed in a process of curriculum development which set forth targets for foreign language teaching to be achieved at the end of Years 3, 6 and 9. These targets are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Level A 2.2 is required from all learners by the end of Year 9 in the areas of listening, reading and speaking, and level A 2.1 for writing (EDK-Ost, 2009). This can be used to establish whether children do in fact reach the claimed identical level of proficiency in both languages by the end of Year 9.

Only 8 German-speaking cantons so far have implemented the above strategy of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education in bringing forward the initiation of two foreign languages to primary level. All other cantons are deferring initiation of the second foreign language to secondary level I for the time being. An overall total of 95% of students in Switzerland are taught two foreign languages at secondary level I in Switzerland. The European average is only 58% (EU, 2008).

Learning achievements are assessed using the European Language Portfolio. However, it is not yet in common use at secondary level I. This will change in the coming years as more cantons make it compulsory to use ESP II and provide further education in support of it.

Secondary level II

Secondary level II in Switzerland is divided among three school types: Gymnasium (upper secondary school), Berufsfachschule (vocational school), Fachmittelschule (specialised middle school). Five qualifications can be achieved:

- approx. 20% of a birth cohort earn an upper secondary level II certificate or matura (*gymnasiale Matur*),
- approx. 65% of a birth cohort earn a vocational certificate (*Berufsfähigkeitsausweis*) and vocational matura certificate (*Berufsmatur*),
- approx. 5% of a birth cohort achieve specialised middle-school certificate and specialised matura certificate (*Fachmatur*).

About 10% of a birth cohort achieves no subsequent qualifications from secondary level I.

The meaning and quantity of foreign language teaching differ across and within each of the five qualifications:

In the two- to four-year **vocational education** system, compulsory foreign language teaching is absent in cases where foreign languages are considered unnecessary in terms of learning and carrying out a particular job (e.g. baker, printer, photography, landscape gardener). In contrast, English is a compulsory foreign language for trainee lab techs, service personnel, and dental assistants. French is compulsory for trainee booksellers and sales assistants. Both foreign languages are compulsory for commercial trainees (Kanton Zuerich, 2008). Achieving a vocational matura qualification (*Berufsmatur*) requires at least two foreign languages.

At least two foreign languages are compulsory in **Gymnasien** (upper secondary II level) and **Fachmittelschulen** (specialist middle schools), though the aspired degree of proficiency differs. Foreign languages may have special weighting in matura schools for those who choose them as majors or additional subjects and so are assigned more teaching time.

The Maturitäts-Anerkennungsreglement (MAR; matura certificate recognition policy) 1995 introduced the opportunity in Switzerland for upper secondary level II schools to deliver a bilingual training course where successful completion was officially attested to with an entry in the matura certificate. It requires teaching of at least two subjects in the chosen immersion language, with a total minimum number of 600 course hours. About 70 of the 177 recognised upper secondary level II schools now deliver bilingual matura qualifications, and about 10% of upper secondary level II students leave school with the qualification (Elmiger, 2008).

Bilingual classes are not limited to upper secondary level II schools. Vocational colleges also provide immersive language training. This is the case at 70 vocational school classes

(about 2.5%) in the canton of Zurich. 40% of classes involving bilingual instruction are for information technology and retailing trainees. The remaining hours are divided among many professions. In many cases, a single teacher provides this service (Kanton Zuerich, 2008).

Use of the European Language Portfolio III (ESP III) for young people over the age of 15 and adults is inconsistent. Three cantons say they use ESP III in all their training courses with foreign languages, but actual use may differ greatly within a canton depending on the education programme. All in all, ESP is most commonly used in vocational schools and schools offering vocational matura programmes. Although language portfolios are already used in the majority of cantons, distribution of their use across all levels is still fairly low.

International foreign language certificates are broadly appreciated and recognised as proof of useful foreign language skills. One reason is that they are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Students at vocational matura schools, specialist middle schools and upper secondary schools in most cantons, can acquire foreign language certificates, and can attend courses preparing for the certificate exams (IDES, 2009).

Foreign language teaching research

Primary level

As proposed in the EDK language concepts, some cantons offer foreign language teaching from primary Year 3. Initial results of evaluation are available for German-speaking Switzerland (Bader & Schaer, 2005; Haenni Hoti, 2007; Husveldt & Bader Lehmann, 2009). They unanimously show high acceptance and high motivation both on the part of teachers and pupils. According to these evaluations, the children meet the stated learning targets cited in the respective curriculum. However, the studies identify issues relating to differences in performance which present a particular problem for those teaching foreign languages and constitute a challenge that has not been fully overcome - manifesting as understimulation in some children and overstimulation in others.

French-language cantons, including Geneva, have the longest track record in early foreign language teaching. An investigation of current status (Schwob, 2008) was conducted there in light of the targets proposed in the EDK language concept, which in turn is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The study showed that 84% of learners achieved the stated learning outcomes in German as a foreign language by the end of primary school; however, the curriculum is not (yet) CEFR-oriented. In another two tests based on the future target learning outcome (CEFR level A1), only 74% and 72% of learners achieved the set target level. Interviewed teachers said that one of the criteria for achievement of the target level by 2010 would be to improve the qualifications of teaching staff. The respondents said that almost 40% of teaching staff do not meet the minimum requirements (CEFR level B2) for teaching foreign languages, introduced in 2007.

Empirical data are also available from school experiments involving early bilingual teaching. They show that immersive foreign-language teaching is successful, has no negative effects

on school-language proficiency, and has no deleterious effects on subject content or knowledge (Brohy, 2004; Schwob & Ducrey, 2006). A longitudinal study of the efficacy of foreign-language teaching at primary level in central Switzerland has shown that the introduction of English teaching in primary Year 3 has no negative effects on the development of reading comprehension in German, even for multilingual children from a migrant background (Haenni Hoti & Werlen, 2007).

Secondary levels I and II

Research at secondary level I is primarily interested in elucidating whether the defined proficiency level is achieved in the two foreign languages (initiated at different stages of schooling) for all learners by the end of compulsory schooling, i.e. by the end of Year 9, despite the earlier start for one of the languages and the difference in the total number of hours taught – in the canton of Zurich, for instance, 800 English lessons are taught from primary Year 2 and 640 French lessons are taught starting from primary Year 5.

The main area of scientific interest for secondary level II in recent years has been the newly introduced bilingual *matura*, relating, in particular, to demand and efficacy.

Demand in many cases exceeds the number of places available. Since the limited places are generally assigned to the students with the best attainment levels, the “bilingual” classes are not fully comparable with the other classes. The bilingual classes work at a higher level to begin with, and this difference continues to remain in evidence throughout (Elmiger, 2008).

A bilingual teaching pilot project at upper secondary schools was conducted in the canton of Zurich and evaluated in comparison with socio-demographically similar reference classes. The evaluation revealed differences between the immersion concepts of the schools involved, and differences in the criteria for enrolment of students to immersion classes. The studies also showed that students in immersion classes (partly because of a specific affinity for languages, high level of interest in English, and above-average motivation and performance) do better in English than students in reference classes. Their subject/content performance in subjects taught through English was as good as that of reference students, and positive effects of immersion were evident in respect of other areas too (independent learning, perseverance) (Hollenweger, Maag Merki, Stebler, Prusse and Roos, 2005).

Conclusion

In recent years, Switzerland has developed a language policy that is demanding but appropriate to its situation as a multilingual, multicultural country situated in the heart of Europe. Implementing that policy throws up a variety of challenges for the educational system at all levels and stages. The conditions for acquisition of the standard and school language are complicated firstly by the situation of diglossia and, secondly, by Switzerland's many children from family backgrounds that are both foreign-speaking and underprivileged, and who are not (yet) being offered optimum learning opportunities at school in many cantons. PISA 2000 brought these problems to light and prompted an array of activities among educational policymakers, educational administrators and educational researchers. Of interest to research is the question why many children, especially boys from deprived

backgrounds, benefit too little from the usual teaching in the school language. Ways to remedy this are being sought. Proposals being tried out range from early promotion of literacy, to teaching that is better attuned to the different dimensions of language, reading and writing, and to a profound re-thinking of literacy practice in schools.

Multilingualism is an aspiration for every section of the population, and much attention is devoted to this objective as early as primary school. The curiosity, joy in learning, and playful, carefree attitude of young pupils, are harnessed in order to familiarise them with language diversity, to further develop their (already existing, in some cases) multilingualism, and enable exposure to (further) foreign languages. New didactic approaches (integrative language didactics, immersion, CLIL) are being explored to make foreign language teaching more effective. If language policy and strategy are to meet the desired ambitious goals, however, much still remains to be done in respect of research, teaching and school development, teacher training and continual professional development for teaching staff.

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Mother tongue tuition for foreign background students – what does it mean for their learning? Results and implications from a Swedish study

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Mother tongue tuition for foreign background students – what does it mean for their learning? Results and implications from a Swedish study

—Eva Wirén

Abstract

Over the past decades Sweden has gradually developed to a country characterized by an increasing diversity of people from varying cultural backgrounds. Almost a fifth of students in Swedish compulsory education have today a foreign background; either as born abroad or as born in Sweden of foreign-born parents. These students are entitled to tuition in Swedish as a second language. They are also entitled to tuition in their mother tongues, where mother tongue tuition in the Swedish context refers to tuition for foreign background students in their native languages. Comparing patterns of academic success the difference between students of Swedish background and students of foreign background is significant. The focus in this chapter is on the practice of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students, and on what this tuition means for their learning, in terms of how they succeed in their studies. The question of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students in the Swedish school represents a political issue and debate in Sweden. The results indicate a possible effect of participation in mother tongue tuition, apparent by the generally higher merit ratings for these foreign background students – a result which contrasts the marginalised position that this tuition seems to occupy in Swedish schools. The context for the study is the Swedish compulsory education, i.e., with students up to age of fifteen. The chapter draws heavily on results from a study carried out in 2009 at Skolverket, the National Agency for Education. The study involved three sub-studies: a national survey study, a qualitative interview study and analyses of a statistical longitudinal data-material.

An introduction

The focus in this chapter is on mother tongue tuition for students with foreign backgrounds, and what this practice really means for their learning in terms of how they succeed in their studies. Mother tongue tuition in Sweden refers to tuition in the respective native language for foreign background students.¹ The results indicate a possible positive effect of participating in this tuition for foreign background students, a result which is analysed in relation to other factors that might explain these students' comparatively higher merit-ratings.

The context for the study is the Swedish compulsory education, i.e., students up to the age of fifteen. The chapter draws heavily on results from a recently performed study at the National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2009). The study involved a nationally representative survey study directed to the head(s) of schools with a minimum of 10% of students with another mother tongue, a qualitative interview study performed at 13 schools in four districts, and analyses within a statistical longitudinal data material in a follow-up of students in compulsory education year 3 to 9.²

¹ This means that the term is not used when referring to tuition in Swedish, which instead is referred to as tuition in Swedish (or in Swedish as a second language, which is an option for foreign background students.)

² The majority of children in school's year 3 are 9 years old and 15 years old in school's year 9

An increasing number of students with a mother tongue other than Swedish, and a general pattern of lower school results

In 2008/09 almost a fifth or 18% of students in compulsory education had a different origin, either born abroad or born in Sweden with foreign-born parents. For each year the number has increased by 1% or 2% and according to the population prognoses the proportion of foreign-born people is continuously increasing. As a figure of comparison, about 100 000 people immigrated to Sweden in 2007 (SCB, 2008).

Whereas Swedish is a first language and mother tongue for the majority of students in the Swedish school, it represents a second, or perhaps third, language for an increasing number of students. In practice, for this group of students this means studying the various subjects taught in school in parallel to trying to master Swedish, as a language and as the language of teaching. This may serve as one explanation to the general pattern of lower school results for the group of students with a foreign background, as displayed in table 1. As a group, students with foreign background perform about twenty points less in comparison with Swedish background students, and about twice as many are not eligible for studies at upper secondary school or did not reach the goals in all subjects (Table 1).

Table 1. Students leaving compulsory education in 2007/08 who had, or should have had, grades from school year 9

	Average merit rating	Percentage of students (%) who are eligible for studies at upper secondary school	Percentage of students (%) who did not reach the goals in one, several or all subjects
Total (N)	209,3	88,9	23,4
Students with Swedish background	212,0	91,0	20,8
Students with foreign background	192,7	76,6	39,0

However, although the average pattern is convincing, it is important to recognise that the variation within the group of foreign background students is considerable, hidden by the average. The difference between having immigrated as a student, and being born in Sweden with immigrated parents, is one main source of variation. This difference relates in particular to the question of when the foreign-born students have arrived to their new country. Students who arrive before school has started do not perform much worse on average than students with foreign background born in the country. Thus, arriving late to the Swedish school is a major factor in the generally lower school result for the group of immigrated students. Another generally important factor concerns students' social backgrounds. The influence from family background is as considerable for foreign background students as for students with a Swedish background (Skolverket, 2004).

The variation in terms of linguistic competence, and also of cultural and social backgrounds, among students – within school and frequently within the same classroom – represents one of the key challenges for schools, and for individual teachers, to confront.

A school for all – and what the Swedish school has to offer students with a foreign background

In the sixties, Sweden changed from a parallel school system to a comprehensive system – a school for all. The main idea of this reformation was to provide equal opportunities for children to have an education, irrespective of their family background.³ With today's increasingly higher number of students with a foreign background, and more generally put, with an increasingly varied group of students, the question is what tools schools have to meet this demand in terms of teaching and education.

The Compulsory School Ordinance regulates in principle three specific actions concerning the group of students with a foreign background (see below). One is the teaching of *Swedish as a second language* and the other is to offer *mother tongue tuition*. The practice of *study guidance*, which involves the possibility for students to have the teaching and their studies within various subjects supported by explanations in their mother tongue, is also regulated.

Swedish as a second language

The head of the school decides the need for foreign background students' to participate in the teaching of Swedish as a second language where the Ordinance specifies this as if necessary. As such, the teaching of Swedish as a second language is specified to replace the teaching of Swedish, i.e., the students are supposed to participate only in the one or the other of the two subjects.⁴

Mother tongue tuition

Mother tongue tuition is a question for the municipality, and not decided by the school, which is obliged to offer the tuition to students with a mother tongue other than Swedish. Some conditions regulate this offer. In order to participate, the students are required to have a basic knowledge in their mother tongue and it must constitute a daily spoken language. The regulation does not force municipalities to offer the tuition for mainly two reasons. One is the case of less than five students within the municipality, and the other is a lack of teacher competence.

Study guidance

The Ordinance specifies that a foreign background student in need of study guidance in his or her mother tongue is entitled to such guidance.⁵

³ Sixten Marklund has described the reformation of the education from a parallel to a comprehensive system in several publications. A summarised report can be found in Marklund, S (1984)

⁴ In practice, however, this is not always the situation. Instead various studies reveals a rather more mixed up, and confused, situation in school as relates to the teaching of Swedish for this group of students. See for instance Skolverket (2009)

⁵ The Ordinance does not, however, specify very clearly what is actually meant by study guidance, which is displayed as a point of confusion for many schools in the study.

Mother tongue tuition as a school subject

Present system and history

An integration policy that declared the right for immigrants to keep and develop their original culture and language laid the ground for the introduction in 1977 of state financed mother tongue tuition in the educational system, i.e., the right for foreign background students to get tuition in their native language. The strategy, formulated in the late sixties, for the state's action about the question of integration of immigrants came largely as a response to the immigration of labour occurring at the time. The agreement reached on an immigrant and minority policy in the mid 70s contrasted the earlier prevailing idea – that society must be built on cultural unity in order to achieve the goals of the Welfare state of social equality. Whereas a perspective of assimilation had dominated much of earlier Swedish politics, which was directed towards national minorities, the individual cultural identity was now regarded as a value. Behind the new political slogan “equality, liberty of choice and collaboration” was the idea that inhabitants with another geographical and/or cultural background should be integrated in the Swedish society maintaining their culture of origin (Borevi, 1998).

By the time of the 1977 reform municipalities were mandated to offer mother tongue tuition to foreign background students entitled to such tuition.⁶ The introduction of mother tongue tuition reflected a tolerance towards other cultural values, languages and religions (Skolverket, 2003) and except for introducing a teacher education for mother tongue teachers both bilingual education and active bilingualism in school were supported.

In the early nineties the educational system was decentralised. This change represented a major shift in educational politics, going from a centralised state control to a governing by municipalities. The economic conditions changed, which, among other things, affected the practice of mother tongue tuition. Today it is up to the individual municipality to decide how to spend their total budget, as special funding controlled by the state is no longer the case. Perhaps in response to these changes, a drastic reduction of mother tongue tuition has occurred over time (Skolverket, 2003) The teacher education for mother tongue teaching was discontinued in 1991, but a present proposal for a new teacher education argues in favour of establishing an education for mother tongue teachers (SOU, 2008: 109).

A political issue and debate

The question on the necessity of offering mother tongue tuition for foreign background students in Swedish school is political, and is debated from time to time. One principal concern expressed is the idea that the teaching is of no use, or even negative, for students' learning, and that it would be more effective, from a societal point of view, to support the learning of Swedish. The proponents in favour of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students lean largely on the arguments from bilingual research, namely that proficient knowledge in the first language is positive for the learning of a second language and, in general positive for the learning process.

⁶ To offer tuition was already in practice, but occurred on a voluntary basis before the reformation

Modern language steering documents include, in addition to a perspective on the language itself, a perspective on the culture surrounding the language in question. Regarding steering documents for mother tongue tuition for foreign background students, they also include perspectives on language and culture, but in addition include aspects of cultural identity, for the individual. Many mother tongue teachers in the study describe the two components of the subject, language and cultural identity, as equally important in their tuition and for their students. In this sense the mother tongue subject can be seen to have a wider purpose when compared to other modern languages.

In the current policy of meriting studies in modern language for entrance to university studies, proficiency in the mother tongue has not been included.⁷ Whereas current educational policies otherwise value knowledge of languages, the possession of a mother tongue other than Swedish is not regarded as an asset. This reflects what seems to be an ambivalent attitude towards the position of language, as it could be regarded obvious for language, including proficiency in mother tongue(s), to hold a generally strong position within school and the educational system (Nihlfors, 2008).

The lower status for other mother tongues than Swedish is also reflected when considering mother tongue tuition for foreign background students at school.

Mother tongue tuition at school – status and position

A marginalised and peripheral activity in many schools

The Ordinance obligates the municipality to be responsible for mother tongue tuition for foreign background students, but the tuition normally occurs within the school. The municipality most often employs the mother tongue teachers, and the teachers are not, in this sense, a part of the teacher collective at the school in which the tuition occurs. That the municipality is responsible for mother tongue tuition might partly explain that schools frequently demonstrate a lack of insight into this business, even if the tuition occurs on the schools' grounds and for their students. That mother tongue tuition is a responsibility of the municipality – and not for the school – also makes sense. There can be substantial practical problems involved for the single school with few students, to, for instance, locate a teacher. At a majority of schools there is not one but a number of different linguistic student backgrounds represented, which would require equally many teachers for tuition in the various mother tongues that these students represent.

Mother tongue tuition appears largely to be an external activity in relation to other school-based activities in the study. Many teachers describe a work situation that underlines such an interpretation. Their stories include teaching outside school hours, traipsing between different schools, and sometimes even having to look for a room in which to hold the lesson.

The results from the survey study corroborate the teachers' statements with a pattern of mother tongue tuition as scheduled mainly outside the school's timetable. But, nine out of ten schools offer the tuition, and for each of the primary school years, although a little less

⁷ With the exception for a specific module in a later course which is rewarded with half a merit point.

frequent for the later years. Normally the tuition is limited to between 40 and 60 minutes per week. Six out of ten schools are in principle offering all entitled foreign background students tuition. To offer all students is a more common response from schools where every other student has another mother tongue. The schools offering tuition to just some of the entitled students have by contrast more often a low number of foreign background students (less than 15%). When asked about the reason why only some students and not all are offered tuition, they frequently mention a lack of teacher competence, remembering that the Ordinance leaves room for the possibility of this excuse.

Summing up, mother tongue tuition for foreign background students appears to a high degree to be a marginalised and peripheral activity in school. This does not take away the fact that many other subject teachers in the study expressed that they would like to see a more developed cooperation between mother tongue teachers and themselves. These teachers regard it a waste not to make use of the mother tongue teachers' specific insights and competence, for the benefit of their teaching other subjects to the same group of foreign background students.

Possible effects of participation in mother tongue tuition

Patterns of participation

Not all foreign background students participate in mother tongue tuition. As opposed to other subjects taught in school, mother tongue tuition is optional for the students to attend. There are various organisational reasons for students not to participate in the tuition. A first prerequisite for their attendance is of course that the school/municipality in fact offers the tuition to their students. That this is not always the case was noted above; where in particular schools with fewer foreign background students not always offer all entitled students tuition. Reasons for not participating in this tuition given by the mother tongue teachers and students reflect large difficulties inherent within the organisation of the tuition, pointing for instance to the extra hours of work outside the school timetable.

Both the longitudinal statistical study and the questionnaire study serve to shed light over the students' participation. Official statistics report an average of every second student participating (of those foreign background students who are entitled) in the tuition. The present study can add that participation is more common in schools with a high percentage (> 50%) of students with a foreign background – where two out of three students participate. A majority, about seven out of ten, both of first and second-generation immigrant students have participated in the tuition at some point between their school year 3 and 9.⁸ Noteworthy is that almost a fifth of students, who in official statistics represent a Swedish background but who have one foreign-born parent, are also participating in the tuition. On average, the students participate in the tuition for about three years, but a longer period is more common for foreign-born students, i.e. first generation immigrant students.

Comparatively more students participate in the lower school years and participation decreases continually thereafter up until school years 6, or 7 (age 12 -13), then increases

⁸ Where this time-span refers to the design of the study used for these analyses. The first data collected refer to school year 3. The students who are registered to have participated in year 3 can quite likely have participated in the tuition already for year 1.

again in the later school years 7-9. This pattern of participation fits well with the reports from the mother tongue teachers. Reaching their teens, more students take an interest in their identity and cultural belonging, where for foreign background students the tuition in their mother tongue offers a closer contact with their cultural origin.

Merit ratings

Longitudinal statistical material offers the possibility of studying the relation between participation in different tuition and merit-ratings. Considering the general pattern of merit ratings⁹ for students with different backgrounds, the greatest difference is visible, as might be expected, between foreign-born students and the students with Swedish background (Table 2) Students from a mixed family background, i.e. with one Swedish parent and one parent born abroad, have an almost identical merit rating when compared with students from a Swedish background, i.e., born in Sweden of Swedish-born parents.

Table 2 Average merit rating for students of different background

Students with Swedish background	Students born abroad	Students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents	Students born in Sweden of one Swedish and one foreign-born parent
207,92	195,05	199,18	205,82
(n=6896)	(n=548) ⁹	(n=634)	(n=875)

School sources often point out inadequate knowledge of Swedish as an important factor in the general lower average results for students with a foreign background. Part of the difference is however possible to relate to a difference in family background, where foreign-born students more often come from homes with low level of education and a weaker connection to the labour market.¹⁰ In addition, parents could be disadvantaged more generally in terms of their possibilities to support their children with their schoolwork. Aside from language issues it can also be a question of parents being less familiar with school, and the educational system, irrespective of their ambitions and desires for their children's education.

The crucial question then is what schools can do to even out these types of initial value differences for students. This is a question not least of what tuition students are offered, and the significance it has for their learning.

A positive effect of mother tongue tuition ...

With the marked exception of a large-scale American study on the effects of participation in different types of study programs for foreign background students (Wayne and Collier, 1997) it is difficult to find any example of studies that get close to this line of investigation – what mother tongue tuition actually means for foreign background students' learning

⁹ The merit rating is based on the 16 best grades in the students' final grade (a criteria-related grading in four levels; Fail (0), Pass (10), Pass with distinction (15) and Pass with special distinction (20)) with a maximum of 320 points.

¹⁰ For the relative importance of these type of background factors, see Skolverket (2004)

(Bakken, 2007) Considering the debate about mother tongue tuition there are good reasons to try to shed some light on the question of whether the tuition has any positive, negative, or for that matter, no effect at all on the students' learning.

For the purpose of this chapter, we will specifically look at the merit-ratings for the students participating in mother tongue tuition, using the group of Swedish background students as a main group of reference.¹¹

According to the Compulsory School Ordinance, there are four possible career patterns when considering the total group of students with a mother tongue other than Swedish in the Swedish compulsory education, all of which appear in the analysis of the statistical material at hand. The most common career is the group of foreign background students that participated to various degrees in both mother tongue tuition and in Swedish as a second language.¹² Another group of foreign background students did not participate in any other tuition than for Swedish background students, i.e., not in mother tongue tuition or in Swedish as a second language.¹³ That leaves two respective groups of foreign background students who participated in one of the two subjects, either in Swedish as a second language¹⁴ or in mother tongue tuition.¹⁵

Comparing students' merit ratings in table 2 above to the merit-ratings displayed for foreign background students participating in mother tongue tuition in table 3 below, the pattern is consistent and obvious. Students who have participated in mother tongue tuition leave school with comparatively better grades, as expressed in their comparatively higher on average merit ratings (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 3. Average merit ratings for students of different foreign background who participated in mother tongue tuition¹⁶

Students born abroad	Students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents	Students born in Sweden of one Swedish and one foreign-born parent	Total group of students
216,27	228,57	213,99	220,22
(55)	(n=129)	(n=138)	(n=322)

...or are there other possible explanations?

Is it then possible to understand the high merit ratings for foreign background students who have participated in mother tongue tuition? It is possible to state with certainty that participation in mother tongue tuition co-varies with merit rating for foreign background

¹¹ The full description is available in Skolverket (2009)

¹² Representing 50% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 68% of students born abroad

¹³ Representing 18% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 9% of students born abroad. Concerning this group of students born abroad it represents mainly students from other Nordic countries.

¹⁴ Representing 11% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 13% of students born abroad

¹⁵ Representing 21% of the students born in Sweden of foreign-born parents, and 10% of students born abroad

¹⁶ The table includes only students who has studied mother tongue but not in combination with Swedish as a second language. The group that participates in mother tongue tuition is larger, if including also the students who participate in Swedish as a second language. This group is not included here (but in the report 321 for the interested reader), since it would require quite another discussion not in focus for the purpose of this chapter.

students, but not with certainty that the high merit-ratings in fact are caused by the tuition, and the tuition alone. When, for instance, remembering that the tuition normally does not encompass more than one lesson (40-60 min) per week, it is fully legitimate to ask if there could be other possible and perhaps even more plausible explanations to the observed higher merit-ratings for these students.

The longitudinal statistical material used in the study gives a possibility to get closer to the question of effect, by studying the merit ratings for different “career patterns” for foreign-background students in compulsory education. It should however directly be noted that it is not a question of causal relationships, which would require an altogether different type of study. The material used for the analysis is however unique insofar as it tracks (a representative sample of) a year cohort of students in compulsory education from year 3 until the end of year 9. The time-period concerned is between the spring terms of 1997 to the spring term of 2003, when the students left school from year 9. Of relevance for these analyses are the annual administrative data (covering details of participation) and certain register detail information regarding, for instance, migration and the parents’ level of education and employment that are linked to the students.

As it is obviously hard to control all other possible circumstances that can come into this relation, it makes sense to comment on the results more in terms of *possible* than *actual* effects.

Having said this, several of the interviewed mother tongue teachers emphasised that the foreign background students who do well in the mother tongue subject usually also do well in other subjects. The teachers saw this as an effect of their tuition and said that the mother tongue tuition for these students strengthens them in the rest of their schoolwork. This is not only attributed to the learning of the language in question, but the teachers also stress the importance of the tuition for the students’ identity building and general self-confidence.

It can be stated that the *number of years* in tuition seems to have certain significance. A comparison among students in this regard indicates a somewhat higher merit rating for students who have participated for a comparatively longer time.

The statistical study also admits to checks for certain background information, such as the students’ gender and cultural and social backgrounds.

Considering *gender*, there could be an effect of girls being over-represented in the tuition, recognising that girls generally have better results in school. But considering the gender distribution in mother tongue tuition, it proved to be relatively even and a co-variation between the participation and the higher merit rating is visible for both boys and girls.

Nor is it the case that students with a background in *certain countries* participate to a greater extent in mother tongue tuition, so the factor of specific linguistic backgrounds cannot be attributed to the high merit ratings.

The students’ *social backgrounds* are of relevance for their participation in mother tongue tuition. Almost half the group of foreign background students who participated in the

tuition has parents who have a post-secondary education. This background seems to be of relevance for the recruitment of students to the tuition. This does not, however, mean that it is this profile of higher social background that serves to explain the higher merit ratings.

In fact, it is important to note that the observed differences in recruitment profile do not seem to have a direct effect on the observed high merit rating for these students. Comparing groups of foreign background students deriving from different social backgrounds, the merit rating is consistently higher within each of these different social background groups for the students who have in common participation in mother tongue tuition.

In summary, the pattern of higher merit ratings for foreign background students who have participated in mother tongue tuition is consistent, and cannot be explained by any gender, cultural or social background differences for these students. As we have managed to rule out some of the possible other influences on the observed relationship we still cannot conclude with certainty and speak in terms of cause and effect. An interpretation is called for to make sense of the observed co-variation between participation and merit-ratings.

Possible interpretations of an observed relationship

One possible interpretation is in line with bilingual research, saying that proficiency in the mother tongue is positive for students' second language learning, here Swedish. This works positively for their general academic performance, Swedish being the school language – which in turn is likely to produce high merit ratings.

An alternative interpretation would be that right from the start it is a question of the “best” students with the most motivated parents, irrespective of social backgrounds, who can “afford” extra studies in the mother tongue tuition – students who perhaps, even without this tuition, would have left school with the high merit ratings. Motivation and ambition are examples of factors that we cannot control for in this data material.

Looking at the contrasting interpretations outlined above, accepting that we cannot state the relationship with absolute certainty, the results indicate strongly that there might be an effect of participating in mother tongue tuition for foreign background students' learning. Considering the debate arguing that the tuition might be negative or at least insignificant for these students in terms of their learning in school, the study gives evidence against such presuppositions.

Consequences and proposals for action – a step forward

Because of the results of the study concerning the practice of mother tongue tuition for foreign background students in Swedish schools and the eventual effect on such tuition for students learning, a natural next step is to deal with possible consequences. What can be done to improve the situation in compulsory education for students with another mother tongue?

At the regulating, governing level

All in all, the study describes an activity for students with foreign background in Swedish

compulsory education that varies to a large extent depending on the specific school. Besides varying access to mother tongue tuition the variation between schools is highly visible when considering more generally what schools have to offer students with a foreign background. This includes also study guidance and tuition in Swedish as a second language. From the Swedish perspective that emphasises equality as an important aspect of the educational system, it cannot be regarded as fair that the prerequisites of students with foreign background are so different at different schools.

Looking at the responsibility for the governing level, the regulation is fundamental. Schools' often confused attitude over mother tongue tuition indicates a possible need for revision for the purpose of clarification. The fact that the ordinance is directed at a municipality level plays a part in the schools' confusion concerning mother tongue tuition. Although there are good reasons to coordinate activities at a municipal level, as outlined above, there is a need to highlight schools' responsibility in this regard. The practice of mother tongue tuition can, and should be, regarded as part of the schools' general responsibility and lookout for their students.

Taking into account the possible positive effect of participation in mother tongue tuition for foreign background students' merit ratings, a careful analysis of what can be done at a regulatory, governing level is well motivated. This involves both activities strengthening the students' participation in the tuition and a strengthening of the position of mother tongue tuition in Swedish compulsory education. The need for improved integration between mother tongue teaching activities and other teaching activities at the schools were emphasised in the study by teachers and heads of schools. In this context it is worth mentioning that the present proposal for a new Educational Act (Ds, 2009:25) suggests the Act to regulate both mother tongue tuition and mother tongue support (at pre-school) and in addition suggests that mother tongue support should also be regulated for the pre-school class¹⁷. In summary this can be said to represent a strengthening of mother tongue tuition in Swedish compulsory education.

As a more immediate response to the study's results the Agency organises a series of conferences under the theme Education and Integration during 2009. The purpose is to create a platform for knowledge-based conjoint activities for different parties with connection to the question, including other educational authorities and representatives from the political level. With the same aim a network of professionals has been established within the Agency focusing on the area of education and integration.

At the local level – schools and municipalities

Overall, for schools to be more effective in their work with foreign background students a long term, conscientious and considered approach is required. Cummins, (2002) emphasises the importance of drawing up a policy at the school that includes the entire school staff and not only language teachers. He also indicates the necessity of regarding the work on such a policy as a process, rather than a product expressed in a fixed document. As regards the practice of mother tongue tuition, it is essential that schools understand the potential

¹⁷ Which signifies the specific class for six-year olds, the year in-between pre-school and school

of this tuition for the education of their foreign background students. It is also important for schools to organise conjoint activities also involving mother tongue teachers, and in general to strive for a higher degree of cooperation and collaboration between the various actors in the organisation. The question of education for foreign background students should involve all teachers, and not only the mother tongue teacher or the teachers in Swedish as a second language. Research has indicated the necessity of coordination at all levels as far as the multilingual students are concerned, such as integration of language and subject tuition (Axelsson and Bunar, 2006, Hyltenstam and Lindberg, 2004).

This is, of course, a question of competence, where the study has highlighted the importance for the school to be well prepared, by equipping itself with and utilising competence in questions of diversity and second language perspectives, not least important knowledge for the head(s) of the school.

In the study, there are positive examples of schools that demonstrate a more wholeheartedly developed perspective on the question of education for foreign background students. In common for these (few) schools are that they use these students as a starting point in their planning and organisation of work in general, rather than as regarding them a separate problem to be dealt with. The argument is that a developed perspective on language issues is for the benefit of all students, not only for the students with a foreign background.

This changed perspective – to regard multilingualism as a resource and mainstream politics rather than as an isolated problem – might in the end be the more important point of conclusion for schools as well as for the policy level to reflect on.

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Providing foreign language teaching for 7-11 year-olds in England: Successes and challenges

Pauline Wade and Helen Marshall



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Providing foreign language teaching for 7-11 year-olds in England: Successes and challenges

—Pauline Wade and Helen Marshall

Abstract

The article will focus on the results of a recently completed three-year longitudinal survey, which evaluated the nature and extent of language learning provision at Key Stage 2 (7 to 11 year-olds) in England. The research was conducted to monitor progress towards a target set by the Government in the National Languages Strategy, that all primary school children in this key stage should, by 2010, be taught a language in class time.

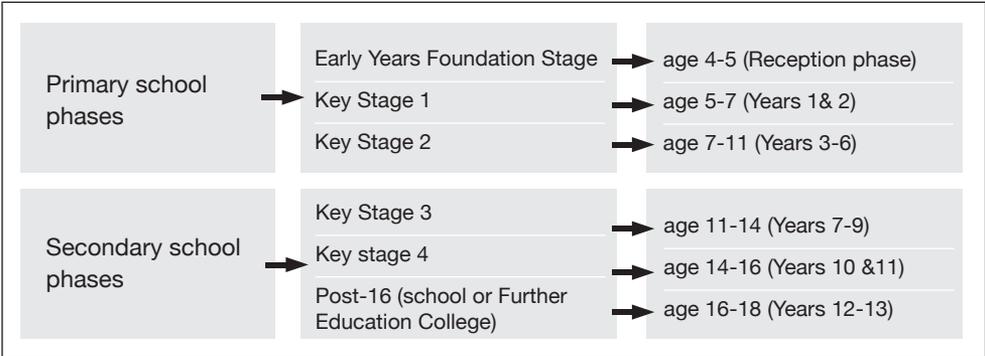
We will discuss the policy background against which the research was undertaken, including the introduction of a primary phase entitlement at the same time as pupils in secondary education no longer had to study a foreign language after the age of 14, and the proposed introduction of languages as a compulsory part of the primary curriculum.

The article will discuss the following key findings: the increase in the number of primary schools providing language teaching to this age group over the last three years, how languages are taught, including the time spent on languages and who is responsible for teaching them, the languages offered, the main challenges to, and the perceived benefits of, teaching primary languages, and the issue of foreign language transition to secondary school, which remains a cause for concern.

Introduction and background

In order to provide context for this article, the simplified diagram below shows the common structure of the state maintained education system in England (there are some regional differences).

Figure 1. Structure of the state maintained education system in



England

Until fairly recently, for the majority of children in the state maintained system in England, there was no opportunity to learn a language, other than English, until they went to secondary school at the age of 11. Primary schools sometimes offered language teaching as an after-school or lunchtime club, or as part of the curriculum for older children (usually those aged 9-11), but the provision varied widely, and in some schools it never existed. Often it was dependent on the skills and interest of individual teachers, or reflected parental demand. However, the disadvantages for English pupils of leaving language learning until they were 11 years old, have been recognised for many years and have been compared to the much earlier start to language learning in many other European countries. It has often been regarded as a reason why interest in, and competence in language learning, is generally less well-developed in England than in other countries.

The efforts of highly qualified specialist language teachers in secondary schools developed the enthusiasm of many of their students over the years, but they were faced by two challenges: one was the relatively restricted timescale in which to build language competence before public examinations at age 16 (in many schools pupils began a first foreign language at age 11-12, and then had the opportunity to begin a second language at age 12-13). The other challenge was the perception among many pupils that languages were difficult, and that a language subject was to be studied because it was compulsory, rather than because they enjoyed it or regarded languages as useful.

In 2004 languages ceased to be a compulsory curriculum subject at Key Stage 4 (age 14-16) in maintained secondary schools, with a consequent decline in the number of students choosing to study them after age 14. As the percentage of students taking a General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) examination in languages at age 16 dropped considerably, and concerns grew about the decline in language learning at secondary level, there was an added impetus to the policy of developing language learning in primary schools.

Encouragement of language learning in primary schools had been boosted by the introduction in 2002 of the National Languages Strategy. One of the main objectives of the Strategy was to improve the learning and teaching of languages at all levels, and a key element was the commitment that all Key Stage 2 pupils (7-11 year-olds) would have the opportunity to learn a language, at least in part in class time, by 2010. The Strategy was accompanied by a programme of support which included extensive training and networking opportunities for primary school teachers and the provision of resources. A review of the Languages Strategy, (Dearing and King, 2007) reported on the success at primary level where *'the take-up of languages has gone very well'* (page 3), and contrasted this with the situation at secondary level, where *'the number taking languages has fallen sharply'*. In relation to primary languages, the report recommended that provision for teacher support should be continued and, where necessary, extended. It also recommended that *'languages become part of the statutory curriculum for Key Stage 2 in primary schools, when it is next reviewed'* (Dearing and King, 2007, page 10).

It was against this background of development and change in language policy in England that the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) project on primary languages was undertaken.

The Primary Languages Project

In 2006, the NFER was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to conduct a three-year longitudinal survey of language learning at Key Stage 2 (primary level age 7-11). The two aims of the research study were to assess:

- the nature and extent of language learning for 7-11 year-olds in schools in England, and
- progress towards implementation of the non-statutory entitlement that all children should be taught a language in class time in Key Stage 2 by 2010.

Methodology

In the three years from 2006 to 2008, all local authorities (the local government bodies responsible for maintained schools) in England were sent a questionnaire which asked them about the progress of schools in their area in teaching languages at Key Stage 2, and about the support they were providing for schools to help them reach the full entitlement. A questionnaire survey was also sent to a sample of nearly 8,000 primary schools (randomly selected and nationally representative). The school response rate was 48% and the second and third surveys were sent to all the schools that responded in 2006 (around 4,000 schools). By the third year, the response rate for schools was 67% and for local authorities it was 74% (there are 150 local authorities in England).

In order to ensure accurate and unbiased estimates of the proportion of schools that were implementing language teaching, a target group of 500 schools was identified from the original sample, and key information from all of these schools was obtained for each year of the research. The proportion of schools implementing primary language teaching within this subset provided, in statistical terms, an unbiased estimate of the proportion of such schools in the population. This target sample was used to weight the responses to relevant questions throughout the final report on the project. The final report (Wade and Marshall with O'Donnell, 2009) discussed the findings from the three years of surveys, focusing on the development of language provision, including assessment and sustainability, and the progress towards meeting the entitlement to primary language learning.

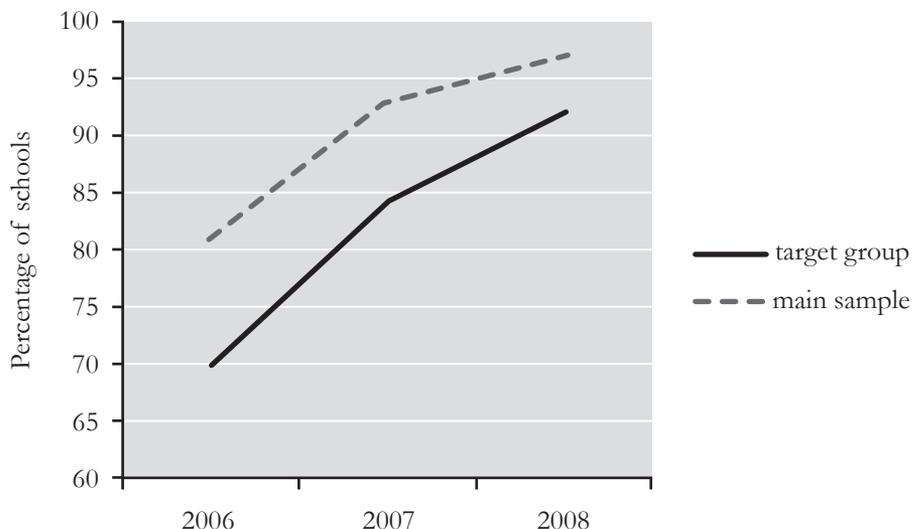
The development of primary language provision

There has been a steady increase in the proportion of primary schools offering pupils the opportunity to study a language in class time since 2002. Indeed, in 2008, almost all primary schools offered languages to children aged between 7 and 11 (figure 2). As was anticipated, schools offering languages were found to be more likely to return the questionnaire than those not offering language learning, so the question on language learning opportunities was asked of all schools in the nationally representative target group.

As figure 2 shows, by 2008, more than nine in ten schools (in both the target group and the main sample) offered languages, compared to an estimated 35% of schools in the 2002/03 academic year (Driscoll et al., 2004). This view was reinforced by the responses from the

local authorities, with 79% of local authorities reporting that between 81% and 100% of primary schools in their area offered a language.

Figure 2. Proportion of schools offering pupils the opportunity to learn a language within class time at Key Stage 2



Source: NFER survey of primary schools, 2006-2008.

The characteristics of a school did seem to have some influence on whether a school offered languages or not. Schools facing more difficult circumstances (those with more pupils from low income families or with a poorer achievement record) tended to be less likely to offer languages.

In addition, schools with higher than average numbers of pupils for whom English was their second language were also less likely to offer opportunities for language learning in class time. It is perhaps surprising to see that schools with a local community fluent in one or more languages other than English did not appear to be harnessing this resource more effectively. Such opportunities could be used to improve pupils' knowledge of the different languages and cultures within the local community, helping to build relationships and understanding between people of different backgrounds.

As referred to earlier, the National Languages Strategy (2002) stated that all Key Stage 2 pupils would be entitled to learn a language, at least in part in class time, from 2010, a target that most schools seem to be working towards. In 2008, two years before this entitlement becomes active, 69% of schools reported that they were offering languages to all or most pupils in all year groups from Year 3 to 6. A further 21% of schools were offering languages to some pupils in these year groups, so not quite meeting the entitlement yet, but making some progress.

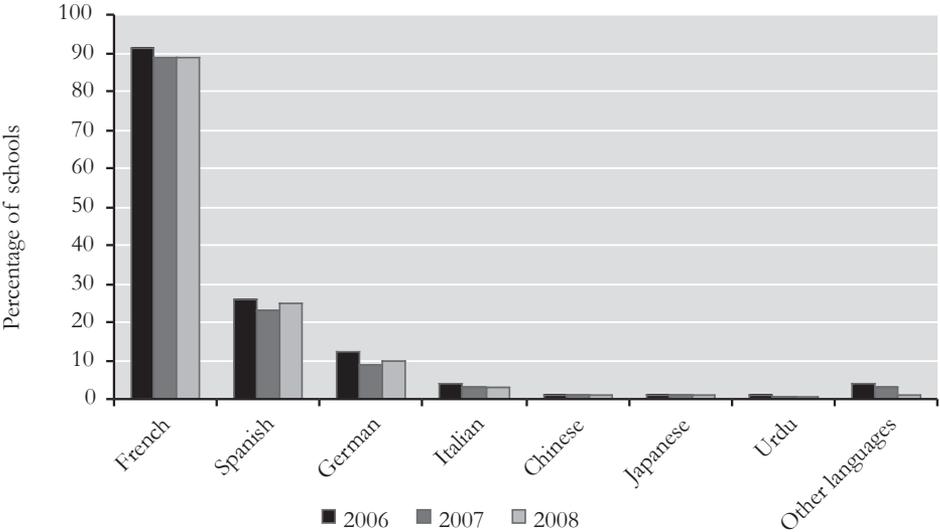
Although there has been a decrease in the proportion of schools not teaching languages in class time since 2006, in 2008 there were still 8% of schools that did not teach a language in class time and thus were not meeting the entitlement at all at this stage. Although there is still time for these schools to put provision in place, it is likely that they will need additional support and resources in order to be ready in time. The Languages Review (Dearing and King, 2007) outlined new training opportunities for teachers and support networks which should go some way in supporting these schools in introducing languages to their curriculum.

In 2007 a review of the Primary Curriculum in England was announced, part of which made way for language learning at Key Stage 2 to be not just an entitlement, but to be a statutory subject, and this will now be the case from September 2011. The majority of schools already teaching languages were confident that they would be ready to meet this statutory requirement, but there were some respondents who felt that their schools would not be able to do so, and of course there was a small, but substantial, minority of schools not teaching languages at all at primary level, which will need the support outlined above to meet their obligations under the statutory requirement.

Which languages are offered by schools?

The languages offered at KS2 are decided by each school, depending on the staff and resources they have available to them. So it is not surprising that the languages on offer in primary schools tend to be those traditionally taught in English secondary schools: French, Spanish and German. Other languages offered, but only by a minority of schools, include Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and Urdu (figure 3).

Figure 3. Languages offered at Key Stage 2 in primary schools in England



Source: NFER survey of primary schools, 2006-2008.

Even though the proportion of schools offering languages at KS2 has increased since 2006, the prevalence of different languages on offer has not changed in this time (again, see figure 3). Many schools said that they considered the languages that local secondary schools and other primary schools offered, when deciding which languages to offer themselves – in part to aid transition in language learning at secondary school level. This suggests that many schools may be reluctant to teach a language not supported by other schools in the area, and so the stronghold of the traditional languages continues. Particular issues related to transition to secondary school will be discussed later in this paper.

Who teaches languages?

Responses to the school surveys showed that, most often, language teaching was carried out by a class teacher with a background in languages, or a class teacher who had received language training. The assistance of teachers and experts from outside the school however, was also utilised – these included specialist teachers employed by the local authority to work in a variety of schools, teachers from secondary schools, and native speakers. Data from the 2008 school survey provided, for the first time, information on the average number of language teachers and their level of language qualification. The median number of staff reported as teaching a language was three (with a range from one in the 25th quartile to five in the 75th).

Table 1 shows the level of language qualifications of staff in responding schools.

Table 1. Teacher language qualifications, 2008

	% of schools with some staff in this category	% of schools with all staff in this category
No language qualifications		
No language qualification and no language training received	12	2
No language qualification, but training to develop pedagogy in languages	19	3
No language qualification, but training to develop language proficiency	16	3
No language qualification, but native speaker	14	3
Have language qualification		
Language qualification below GCSE	4	<1
GCSE (public examination normally taken at age 16)	38	5
Advanced level (public examination normally taken at age 18)	32	6
Degree	38	13
Postgraduate degree	5	<1
Newly qualified teacher (NQT) with specialism in primary languages	4	<1
Initial teacher training in primary languages	4	<1
N = 1594		
<i>Source: NFER survey of primary schools, 2008</i>		

Although there was a considerable proportion of schools with staff who had received training but had no language qualification, so too was the proportion of schools where staff had a language degree. It was not possible within the confines of the report to speculate on why the level of specialist qualification for languages was possibly higher than might be expected at primary level. However, it may relate to a concern that language teaching required specialist knowledge to a greater extent than some other subjects, and that even good training in language pedagogy was not enough to overcome a lack of confidence in language ability. When school respondents were asked what they thought were the main advantages of their schools' current arrangements for language teaching, the feature mentioned most frequently was that a specialist was delivering the language.

How are they taught?

The common pattern was a class teacher working alone or with a teaching assistant, but both internal and external specialist support was also quite widely involved. The median amount of time spent in class per week on languages in 2008 was 40 minutes in year 3 and 4 (7-8 year-olds) and 45 minutes in years 5 and 6 (9-11 year-olds). Around 20% of schools were teaching languages for 50-60 minutes a week in years 3 and 4, and 25% were teaching for that length of time in years 5 and 6. Discrete lessons were the most common delivery model across all year groups and the most common pattern by 2008 was to teach one language lesson each week (around 70% of schools across all age groups). The next most common method was to have some work or activity every day and this was more likely in the younger age groups (19% of schools in year 3 and 14% in year 6). Having two or more lessons each week was more unusual, although this had increased in every year group over the three year survey period (around 12% of schools in 2008).

Challenges and benefits of primary language teaching

On the whole, schools were confident that they would be able to continue to offer their current arrangements for teaching languages; however that is not to say that many did not experience challenges in continuing to offer lessons on languages.

Looking specifically at the challenges of sustaining their current language offer, a third of schools teaching languages said that changes to staffing was a concern. Indeed, the most common reason for schools ceasing to offer a particular language was because the person teaching it had left the school. As one school noted, *'The specialist teacher will leave by the end of the academic year and so class teachers need to prepare to take over language teaching in their classes'*.

Other issues of concern to schools were time constraints, funding, training and resources. The issue of time appeared to be mostly in relation to fitting languages into the timetable, as one school explained: *'it is getting a very high profile in our local authority. However we have to fight for curriculum time alongside literacy and numeracy'*. Another added: *'[there is] not enough time in an already jam-packed curriculum to give the subject justice'*.

In addition, a concern for several schools was the proficiency and confidence of staff in

languages as highlighted by one head teacher: *'it is valuable to teach languages in KS2, but it is restricted by staff confidence/ability'*.

These issues affecting sustainability of language provision at primary level remained relatively constant throughout this three-year project, and they are consistent with the challenges found by the baseline study, carried out in 2002-2003. This reported that, in the words of one head teacher, the main challenges to sustainable teaching of languages are *'time, resources, finance, expertise'* (Driscoll et al., 2004, page 50).

Although schools reported that offering languages is not without challenges, generally schools were confident that they would be able to overcome these issues and continue to offer languages to their pupils. Indeed, that some schools were offering languages to pupils when it was optional for this age group suggests that these schools see particular benefits of teaching a language.

The schools teaching primary languages in 2008 identified several positive outcomes for their pupils. The majority of schools felt that teaching languages at Key Stage 2 would help to develop an enthusiasm for language learning, and this was particularly true for the youngest age groups, suggesting that schools had the attitude that the earlier languages are introduced to pupils the better. Learning about and understanding other cultures was also viewed as a positive aim of teaching languages, and this is of particular importance as local communities become more multicultural, and travel to other countries become easier and cheaper. Language learning was also seen as beneficial for the development of listening and speaking skills, which are a focus of teaching in other subjects at primary level in England.

Other positive outcomes of teaching primary languages included developing knowledge about language, and developing strategies for learning languages: this may make it easier for children to pick up additional languages in the future. Development of reading and writing skills were less frequently mentioned as aims for teaching languages at Key Stage 2, although this was more common for the older age groups (age 9-11).

Assessment and transition – work still in progress

Earlier baseline research in primary language teaching (Driscoll et al., 2004) found that assessment and transition were areas where progress in primary languages was less advanced. The 2006 and 2007 surveys in this study also indicated that both assessment and transition were still challenges to progress. For example, the 2006 school survey indicated that only about 20% of schools were using a formal monitoring and assessment strategy. The 2008 survey asked schools specifically if they were carrying out such monitoring and assessment in language learning – 46% of respondents said that they were and 48% said that they were not (3% did not know and 3% did not respond). In terms of progress over the three years, this was a very positive development and showed considerable improvement from the 20% level of 2006. However, it also indicated the need for continued emphasis on assessment strategies, as more than half the schools still did not appear to be tackling this.

Meeting the challenge on assessment

The slow rate of progress on assessment was not surprising when it is put into the context of languages having only recently been introduced in many primary schools. Also, the National Languages Strategy included an entitlement to language learning by 2010, but did not make it a statutory subject, and for many schools, particularly those with more limited staff resources, providing some language teaching was enough of a challenge, without considering assessment procedures. Although the survey did not address this issue, it is possible to speculate that for many primary teachers, an important aim of introducing languages was to encourage interest and enthusiasm in language learning and that formal assessment was considered to be of less significance at this stage of their pupils' progress, or perhaps, in some cases, may have been regarded as taking enjoyment out of the subject. From a practical point of view too, having information about, and access to, assessment tools may have been more difficult for some schools.

The provision of resources for assessment has therefore been an important means of improving the spread of assessment practices, and there have been a number of developments in this area over the last few years. In 2005 the DCSF introduced the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages, which provided non-statutory guidelines for teaching primary languages and was designed to assist the planning and delivery of the entitlement to primary language learning. Parts 1 and 2 on learning objectives and guidance on implementation were followed in 2007 by part 3 with detailed guidance on planning, including a section on assessment and recording. In the 2008 survey, just under a third of school respondents reported using the Framework as an assessment tool, making it the second most used tool after materials they had designed themselves. Other assessment tools which have been increasingly used are the Languages Ladder¹ and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and local authorities have played their part in encouraging the use of these. The ELP's capacity to allow for self-assessment and teacher assessment has made it a useful tool for primary teachers, as has the Languages Ladder's 'ladder of recognition' of competence. According to the 2008 survey, 17% of school respondents were using the Languages Ladder and 14% were using the ELP. Although this was not large-scale use, there had been a marked increase from the 4% using the ELP in 2006 and the 3% using the Languages Ladder in 2006. This developing use of assessment strategies is important in helping schools progress towards meeting the primary languages entitlement, which included giving pupils the opportunity to have reached a recognised level of competence on the Common European Framework by the age of 11. It is also very significant in assisting progress in another area of concern – that of transition.

Crossing the transition barrier

For the majority of English pupils, who move from primary school to the secondary sector at age 11, this transition marks a major change in their educational journey. The wider issues around transition and the 'culture shock' which many pupils receive when changing from the primary to secondary sector are interwoven with their progress in all subjects, but

¹ See http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/ask_cilt/faqs/testing/languages_ladder.aspx for a description of the Languages Ladder.

there are challenges which are particularly associated with language learning. Depending on the size of their local authority area, secondary schools can often take pupils from a very large number of different primary schools, and the language learning experiences of these pupils can vary considerably. Some may have been learning a language for four years, while others may have no language experience at all. The languages they have been learning may be different, as well as the teaching methods that they have encountered. Some primary schools provide detailed information on pupil progress to secondary schools and others may not do so for languages, particularly if they have not monitored progress. Secondary language teachers therefore often have to make a difficult decision – do they try to find a way of incorporating the previous language experience of all their new pupils, or do they start from the position of the pupils who have done very little or nothing?

It has been clear from open-ended responses to questions throughout the survey period, that there has been concern from primary schools about transition issues. Comments have related in particular to insufficient contact between primary and secondary language teachers and a perception that, in some cases, secondary schools are not aware of the recent progress that the primary sector has made in providing language teaching. Local authorities in 2006 and 2007 reported various means by which they were attempting to encourage transition links, mainly by facilitating collaboration and supporting networking, but in 2006, less than a third (30%) were facilitating the sharing of data. In the 2008 survey, local authorities were asked what specific practices they had in place to support transition in languages and just over a quarter (28%) responded that information on language provision was included in transfer documents. There were much higher response rates to other practices, such as providing support from specialist advisory staff for transition (82%) and encouraging joint language curricular activities (40%). This support from the local authorities for better transition processes was a positive development, but it was not matched by the school responses on which of these practices they used. Only 9% said that they included information on language provision in transfer documents, the same proportion made use of advisory staff and 11% used a joint language curriculum. Almost half the respondents (49%) said that they used none of these practices. School responses on their internal practices to support language transition were similar, as more than a third (34%) said they had none, and 19% did not respond.

Open-ended responses from the 2008 school survey revealed a contrasting mixture of optimism and pessimism about overcoming the challenges of transition. On one hand, there were comments that looked to the future and expected that improvements would soon begin to take effect, for example: *‘The network is now discussing what should be taught in year 6’*, and, *‘From July 2009 we will be sending reports to parents and liaising with secondary colleagues’*.

On the other hand, the pessimistic view was summed up by a respondent who stated: *‘secondary colleagues are not interested in Key Stage 2 attainment’*.

It was also pointed out by some respondents that because languages liaison between primary and secondary schools was often dependent on individuals, it could sometimes be affected by staff changes, as this response explained: *‘Transition activities were very strong in the early stages, but staff changes in our school and in the secondary means we have lost continuity in liaison work’*.

An obvious lesson from the last comment is that there needs to be well-established systems in place for transition so that it is less dependent on individuals, and this is increasingly likely to develop as language teaching becomes part of the primary curriculum. At present however, for many primary language teachers, language progression at age 11 is a real concern and there is a perception that transition strategies need prioritising, because as this teacher stated: *'this is a great barrier to the development of language learning, as we are not confident that secondary schools will not start pupils at the beginning again'*.

Conclusion

The findings from this three year research study have been very positive in revealing the extent to which primary schools in England are moving towards meeting the entitlement for language learning. Far more 7-11 year-olds were receiving some language teaching in class time by 2008 than had been in 2006, and if this encourages enthusiasm for languages and an earlier skills base, it may at least help to reverse the decline in languages at post-14 level. The government's acceptance of the recommendation of the final report of the independent review of the primary curriculum, published in April 2009 (Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, 2009) that languages should be a statutory requirement at Key Stage 2 from 2011, will give further support and impetus to primary language development. It will also make it even more important to tackle the concerns about transition and progression. As many of the respondents to the school survey in 2008 pointed out, the growing success of primary languages could be undermined by a situation in which, *'we are teaching certain areas at primary which are then repeated at secondary level. This is a real issue...and could turn children off languages completely if they can't progress'*.

It is however, an issue which now has plenty of attention. The National Centre for Languages (CILT) has been commissioned to lead a project focusing on effective transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 in languages. From their survey responses, it is clear too that local authorities and primary teachers are aware that having made great progress towards the goal of providing all 7-11 year-olds with the opportunity to learn a language, the challenge of effective transition in languages now needs to be met.

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Language assessment in Austrian preschools

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Abstract

In response to poor results in reading in PISA and PIRLS, the language problems of preschool children have received special political interest in Austria. In order to ensure that preschool children gain sufficient language skills before they start school, the development and implementation of language assessments in preschools as well as the early language improvement became a current challenge for Austria's education system. Since 2005, various measures have been taken by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education to assess and improve the language competence of preschool children. In 2008, Austria's current concept early language improvement in the kindergarten was established and replaced the prior funding initiative language tickets. Currently, the observation tools BESK 4–5 and SSFB 4–5 help to determine the needs for language improvements in the kindergartens nationwide. This article focuses on the concept and aim as well as the implementation, evaluation and further development of the component early language assessment in the kindergarten.

Introduction

In response to the bad results in reading in the international studies PISA¹ 2003 (Reiter, 2004) and 2006 (Breit, 2007) as well as PIRLS² 2006 (Suchan, 2007), the language problems of children at the preschool age have received special political interest in Austria. Reading is one of the most important competences that everyone should gain and perfect in order to establish a basis for life-long learning. Therefore, it was quite alarming for the Austrian government that one child out of five is part of the high-risk group in reading and has insufficient knowledge in reading comprehension. As reading is based on sufficient language skills and language skills are not only essential for reading but for many other parts of life, it was the language competence that was highly focused on. It was obvious that language skills are especially essential for children who are starting their school education. Because the children have to be able to follow the lesson that in Austria is predominantly orally conveyed in the German language, it became more and more important for the Austrian government to improve insufficient language skills of young children. Hence, from the time when the results of PISA and PIRLS were published, Austria's government tried to find out the current status of the language competence of children, who had not yet attended school – preschoolers at the age of 4 to 5. Since 2005, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education has therefore implemented two language assessment measures, the language tickets (BMBWK, 2005; Breit, 2008) as well as the current concept language improvement in the kindergarten (BMUKK, 2008;³ Breit, 2009a; Stanzel-Tischler 2009) that will be introduced and argued in this article.

¹ “Program for International Student Assessment”: OECD-study that surveys the competence of 15-years-olds in reading, mathematics and natural sciences in the principal industrialized countries in a three-year circle.

² “Progress in International Reading Literacy Study”: IEA-study that surveys the competence of 10-years-olds in their reading competence in a five-year circle.

³ Available: http://www.sprich-mit-mir.at/app/webroot/files/file/folder_wien.pdf [21 July, 2009]

Language assessments as the basis for individual language improvements

The German-speaking countries Germany, Switzerland, and Austria all share the same problem, the so called PISA-shock: According to the results in reading at PISA and PIRLS, all three countries are ranked in the midrange of all participating countries. As well, the international studies illustrate that there are also huge differences in the school performance of children who belong to different social groups: On average, children who speak a foreign language as their first language, as well as children from disadvantaged families or weaker educational backgrounds perform much lower in these studies than children from German-speaking families or with strong educational backgrounds. Therefore, all of the three countries tried to find a way to improve the language competence of their students. For that reason, Austria, Germany and Switzerland started to focus on the educational situation and language improvement of their preschoolers (BMBWK, 2005; Schulte-Haller, 2009; Dietz and Lisker, 2008).

Of course, language improvements are only useful if the need for language support is determined at first. During the process of language acquisition the children are going through specific phases that do not always seamlessly follow each other, but that can also overlap with each other (Bredel, 2005). Additionally, there are many language-internal and language-external factors that influence the process (ibid.). Hence, although the process of language acquisition proceeds similarly, each child actually has to go through the language development on their own. Consequently, language improvements have to be individually adjusted to the needs of every single child and cannot be generalised for all the children (Pepelnik, 2008; Ehlich, 2009). For that reason, language assessments – in one form or another – have been developed and implemented with the intention of detecting if certain children show an inadequate language competence (Fried, 2005).

According to Ehlich (2005), there are four basic types of language assessment methods that differ in their objectivity, reliability and validity from a low to a high degree: *estimation procedures, observations, profile analyses and tests*. Nevertheless, all of these methods are essential in order to assess certain language competences, as well as to arrange the suitable language improvement measures. With the help of an appropriate assessment tool, it is possible to detect the language competence of a certain child at a certain time. More importantly, repeated assessments can help to follow the development of the language acquisition process of a child and to pursue the success of the connected language improvements. Then, irregularities, stagnation or progress can be identified (ibid.). After the assessment, the necessary steps for individual language improvement have to be taken in order to support the children in their language acquisition (Pepelnik, 2008).

Language tickets (“Sprachtickets”) – The first screening

In 2005, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education decided to implement a language assessment called *language tickets* (“Sprachtickets”) as their first language screening measure. The Ministry wanted to detect the language competence of every preschool child that

was going to start school in the school year 2006/07 in order to give language support to those children showing an insufficient language competence. At that time the compulsory school attendance in Austria started at six years and there was no compulsory kindergarten attendance before the elementary school. For that reason, the assessment was implemented in the course of the elementary school registration in order to make sure that every child was included in the screening (BMBWK, 2005).

Description

The measure *language tickets* consisted of three components: *early registration*, *early language diagnosis*, and *early language improvement*. In line with the first component, the elementary school registration was changed from spring to the preceding autumn/winter. Between the school registration and the school entry, there were then ten (instead of five) months time remaining for early language improvements in the kindergarten. In order to carry out an early language diagnosis within the elementary school registration, the school principals received guidelines from the Federal Ministry of Education. These guidelines included information about the aims of the language assessment, suggestions as to how to organise and arrange the registration as well as guiding principles for decision making regarding the language assessment (BMBWK, 2005).

The registration, including the language diagnosis, was compulsory for every child. The school principals had a timeframe of maximum 30 minutes per child to talk to the parents and to talk to and work with the child according to the guidelines (ibid). In the course of the registration, it was the school principals' choice whether they were supported by another teacher and whether the children were assessed individually or in a group. After the registration and language assessment, the school principals had to decide, if the children assessed had a good command of German or if they needed further language improvements (ibid).

The third component of the measure, the early language improvement, was then part of the kindergartens. Children, who had shown an insufficient language competence in German, received a voucher in the amount of EUR 80, called *language ticket*, which was funded by the Ministry. They could redeem the language ticket for language improvements of about 120 hours that were offered by the kindergartens. In contrast with the registration and language diagnosis, the language improvements were not compulsory and the parents were only advised to prepare their children for the school entry by letting them attend further language improvements (ibid).

Evaluation

After the first assessment in autumn/winter 2005, the measure was evaluated by Breit (2008). The evaluation took place in a random sample of 30 schools and kindergartens in three Austrian states (Vienna, Salzburg, and Upper Austria). Between May and August 2006, experts of these institutions were interviewed to find out if the measures had been taken according to the guidelines and concepts. Also, the problems that occurred while implementing the measures were evaluated (ibid). Breit (ibid.) also took a closer look at 353 children of these schools that had taken part in the early school registration and the language screening.

Breit (ibid.) analysed if the early language improvements had an observable effect on the language competences of the children. A selection of children was assessed with the language assessment tool HAVAS⁴ as soon as they attended their first elementary school year. Her results show that the desired aim couldn't be reached: the children, who had redeemed their ticket for a 120 hours language improvement before their school entry, were still on the same level as those who hadn't taken part in a language improvement at all (ibid.).

Contrary to Breit (2008), the Magistrate 10 of Vienna (MA 10, 2006) evaluated the measure *language tickets* optimistically. From February to June 2006 they took a closer look at preschool children that had received a language ticket. In a questionnaire survey, the language trainers and kindergarten teachers were asked to estimate the receptive language competence, the active communication skills as well as the language behaviour of their preschool children in German before and after the language improvement (MA 10, 2006). In contrast to Breit (2008), the results of the Magistrate's survey show an enhancement of the language competence of the surveyed children: 27% had sufficient language competences before the language improvement whereas 46% had adequate language skills afterwards (MA 10, 2006). As further evaluated by Breit (2008), language assessments were generally seen as important to detect the needs for language improvements in the preschool age. So the problems of the *language tickets* did not exist in the measure itself, but rather within the organisation and implementation of the assessments and the connected language improvements. One difficulty was that the language assessments of the preschoolers were conducted by elementary school principals. The principals had been prepared with guidelines by the Federal Ministry of Education (BMBWK, 2005) but had not been offered special preparative training in how to do the screening. Therefore, the screening was not standardised and was very subjective (ibid.). Also, the assessment time frame of only 30 minutes was seen as too short. The children were assessed in a new and unfamiliar environment by people they didn't know and for that reason it was likely that some children were uncomfortable with the assessment situation and didn't perform according to their real competences (Breit, 2008). Also, the remaining time for the early language improvements was considered too short and it was recommended that the language improvements start at least one year before the elementary school registration (ibid.). Furthermore it was noted that – in the case of children with a migration background – the first language hadn't been taken into consideration. Last but not least, a compulsory and free-of-charge participation in a language improvement in the kindergarten would be important for all the children concerned (ibid.).

Early language improvements in the kindergarten (“Frühe sprachliche Förderung im Kindergarten”) – the new concept

Although the efficiency of the language tickets was controversial – as demonstrated by the two different evaluations by Breit (2008) and the Magistrate of Vienna (MA 10, 2006) – it was nevertheless important for the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education to assess the language competence of preschool children. Consequently, the *language tickets were redirected*

⁴ Hamburg's method of analysing the level of language competence („Hamburger Verfahren zur Analyse des Sprachstands“, (Reich and Roth, 2004).

to a new concept called *early language improvement in the kindergarten*. Contrary to the language tickets the new concept would include the positive aspects that had already been identified by the evaluation of the language tickets and also those aspects that had been missing in the former measure so far (Breit and Schneider, 2009a).

The three components

Austria's government sees its responsibility in establishing an initiative for early education, even if the child care system is actually a matter of the federal provinces and not of the Austrian government. Therefore, an agreement (Art. 15 a B-VG) was concluded between the Austrian government and its federal provinces in 2008.⁵ The agreement includes several points concerning the institutional child care facilities, e.g. the early language improvement. In order to accord with the agreement, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education commissioned three institutions (Stanzel-Tischler, 2009):

- The BIFIE (Federal Institute for Education Research, Innovation and Development) had to develop an observation tool for an early language assessment in the kindergarten
- The Charlotte Bühler-Institute had to develop one part of a formal curriculum that ought to focus on the early language improvement in the kindergartens (Charlotte Bühler-Institut, 2008).⁶
- The German Competence Center at the Teacher Training College of Upper Austria (Pädagogische Hochschule Oberösterreich) had to develop the education standards for the linguistic competence of children that are to start school, thus at the age of 6.⁷

The measures for language improvements in the kindergartens are funded by the Austrian Government with EUR 5 million per year (Art. 15 a B-VG).

Development of the tools BESK 4-5 and SSFB 4-5

In contrast to the language tickets, the new language assessment was to take place 15 months before the school entry and not during the elementary school registration (Breit and Schneider, 2009a). This early assessment allowed the taking of necessary supporting steps if a child showed an inadequate language competence. As already included in the language tickets, the new screening did not imply a need for expensive external experts. Because the kindergarten teachers knew the children in their group best, the assessments were to take place in the kindergartens. The new tool had to be practicable and economic so that the kindergarten teachers were able to assess the preschool children beside their regular work (Pepelnik, 2008). According to Ehlich (2005) and Fried (2007), the language competence of each single child would also be assessed for a longer period of time and the method was to include not only one or two aspects of language but all the linguistic qualifications that define the usual language competence of children at the age of 4.5 to 5.5.

After setting the frame for the new language assessment, the question remained, which method and instrument would be appropriate, to detect the language competence of

⁵ i.e. available: <http://www.tirol.gv.at/fileadmin/www.tirol.gv.at/themen/bildung/bildung/downloads/15avereinbarung.pdf> [21 July, 2009]

⁶ Available: <http://www.sprich-mit-mir.at/app/webroot/files/file/bildungsplan.pdf> [21 July, 2009]

⁷ Available: http://www.sprich-mit-mir.at/app/webroot/files/file/bs_sprechsprachkomp.pdf [21 July, 2009]

the Austrian preschoolers. Teachers and kindergarten personnel can be seen as experts for the children they take care of and observing children as well as documenting their development is part of their everyday work. Therefore, a language assessment method would be appropriate that included the knowledge and observation skills of the kindergarten teachers and that could also be conducted by them in the kindergarten. Of course, there already existed some language assessment tools for children at the age of 4 to 5 that were constructed for use by kindergarten or primary school teachers, e.g. SISMIK⁸/SELDAK⁹ (Ulich and Mayr, 2003a,b) or MSS¹⁰ (Holler-Zittlau, Dux and Berger, 2003). But these tools did not include all the linguistic qualifications or they were not based on a current linguistic language competence model. Other tools like the HAVAS (Reich and Roth, 2003) included the whole language competence of a child but they were quite time consuming and placed high demands on the kindergarten teachers (Fried, 2007).

Consequently, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education charged the BIFIE to develop new language assessment tools. The new observation tools – created in only 8 months – were based on a current linguistic model of the linguistic competences of preschool children at the age of 4 to 5 (Rössl, 2007). In order to handle the heterogeneous group of preschoolers, two observation tools were developed: on the one hand the BESK 4–5¹¹ (Breit and Schneider, 2008a, b) for children who attend an educational institution like the kindergarten, and on the other hand the SSFB 4–5¹² (Breit and Schneider, 2008c, d) for children who do not attend an educational institution regularly and who are assessed in the course of an open half day.

The standardised observation tools include an observation form, a handbook, a picture or *Where's Wally* book (*Opa Henri sucht das Glueck*¹³ or “*Wimmelbilderbuch*”), and picture cards (*Sprachschatzpiraten*¹⁴). Both tools contain observation items that are assigned to the single linguistic qualifications phonology (e.g. distinguishing initial sounds), morphology (e.g. conjugating verbs or forming singular or plural forms of nouns), syntax (e.g. verb position, verbal bracket or using obligatory determiners), lexicon/semantics (e.g. understanding prepositions or w-questions) and pragmatics/discourse (e.g. expressing needs and intentions). The observations can be carried out by the kindergarten personnel beside their usual kindergarten work and the observation period is scheduled to occur every year in May. The observation form BESK consists of 15 items that are divided into four parts: A – picture book, B – picture cards, C – gym hall and D – conversation. The parts A, B and C require a standardised observation, whereas part D requires a systematic observation (Breit and Schneider, 2008b). The observation form SSFB is a short version of the BESK and it is only used for children who spend an open half day at a kindergarten in order to be assessed. It consists of only 9 items that are divided into three parts: A – picture cards, B – Where's Wally

⁸ Language behaviour and interest in language of migrant children in kindergartens („Sprachverhalten und Interesse an Sprache bei Migrantenkindern in Kindertageseinrichtungen“)

⁹ Language behaviour and Literacy of German-speaking grown up children („Sprachverhalten und Literacy bei deutschsprachig aufwachsenden Kindern“)

¹⁰ Marburger Language-Screening („Marburger Sprach-Screening“)

¹¹ In the following BESK; Available:

http://www.sprich-mit-mir.at/app/webroot/files/file/beobachtungsbogen_besk.pdf [21 July, 2009]

¹² In the following SSFB; Available:

http://www.sprich-mit-mir.at/app/webroot/files/file/beobachtungsbogen_ssfb.pdf [21 July, 2009]

¹³ Cianciarulo, D., Cianciarulo, I. and Antoni, B. (2007): *Opa Henri sucht das Glück*, printed on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK). Vienna, Munich: Betz.

¹⁴ Breit, S., Rössl, B. and Ghavami (2007): *Sprachschatzpiraten. Bildkarten zur Sprachstandsfeststellung*, printed on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture (BMUKK). Vienna: Piatnik.

book and C – pragmatics/discourse (Breit and Schneider, 2008d). In the BESK as well as the SSFB the children get point scores of 0, 1 or 2 per item. The better the language competence in relation to the observed item is, the higher the score will be. In the BESK, a number of 30 (SSFB: 18) points can be reached by every child. A child that reaches 20 (SSFB: 12) points or less needs special language improvements (Breit and Schneider, 2008a, c).

The observation with BESK and SSFB can be seen as an educational basis for the development of an individual support plan for each single child (Breit and Schneider, 2009b). By documenting the weaknesses and strengths of every child, it is possible to identify the individual need for language improvements. Moreover, a repeated observation after a certain span of time may document the progress of the language competence of a child and, consequently, the individual support plan can be revised. Additionally, the documentation of the observation can be a good basis for conversations with parents and experts.

Because the BESK was designed for a four-weeks-observation in the kindergarten, special training in linguistics and the implementation of the assessment tools for the kindergarten teachers was essential. Therefore, support personnel were introduced, who regionally trained the kindergarten teachers in special seminars. This was done to ensure that anyone, who would observe preschool children with the help of the BESK and the SSFB, had enough theoretic background in linguistics and language assessments to conduct the standardised language assessment properly (ibid.).

Implementation and Results

The first language assessment that was based on the new concept *early language improvement in the kindergarten* took place in five states of Austria (Burgenland, Carinthia, Styria, Vienna and Salzburg) in May 2008. The aim of this language assessment was to screen the language competence of all the children, who were going to start school in autumn 2009. The materials (handbooks, observation forms, picture cards and books) were supplied by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education. In the ideal case, the kindergarten teachers were introduced into the observation tools by special training or by the support team. Afterwards they started observing the children with the BESK for a four-week period. The kindergarten teachers documented their observations on the observation form and in the end they arrived at a profile of each child with their strengths and weaknesses regarding to their language competence. For the evaluation of the first language assessment, the results were sent to the BIFIE anonymously (Breit and Schneider, 2009b).

25,167 preschoolers from a total of 40,017 4-year-olds were assessed in the first language assessment with the BESK and SSFB in the five participating Austrian provinces. 24,587 of them attended an institutional kindergarten and 565 were external children (Breit and Schneider 2009c). In fact, the results for 75% of in total 32,687 kindergarten-attending children, who were observed with the BESK, were returned, but only 9% of in total 6,365 external children, who were observed with the SSFB, were forwarded to the BIFIE (Breit, 2009b). As the numbers show, it would be important for future language assessments to find a way of getting in contact with parents, who did not let their children take part in the assessment. Especially those parents, who had not yet sent their children to a kindergarten, should be convinced that their children could profit from attending a kindergarten and an early language assessment.

The results of the first early language assessment with BESK and SSFB show, that 76% of the children have an adequate linguistic competence, whereas 24% have difficulties in German and therefore absolutely need a language improvement (ibid.). Children who do not attend the kindergarten, as well as those who speak German as their second language, need a language improvement more often than children who are already attending a kindergarten (ibid.). Hence, attending a kindergarten seems to have a good educational effect, and an attendance for several years is more beneficial for the linguistic competence of preschoolers. Therefore, letting their children attend an institutional kindergarten is advisable for parents, especially if they have a migration background (ibid.). Within the kindergartens, the kindergarten teachers have the chance to observe the children's language acquisition. They can compensate for problems and difficulties by offering the children specific and individual language improvements.

Evaluation

Up to now, the representatives of the states of Austria, who are responsible for the kindergartens, have been interviewed about the project (Stanzel-Tischler, 2009). Also, the BESK and SSFB have been evaluated and the opinions of the kindergarten teachers have been surveyed (ibid.). At the end of 2009, the influences of the language assessments with BESK and SSFB on the elementary schools will be evaluated and the reasons for an insufficient linguistic competence of school-starters will be analysed.

The first evaluation results by Stanzel-Tischler (ibid.) show the advantages of the language assessment with BESK and SSFB in comparison to the *language tickets*. In contrast with the language tickets, the assessment as well as the implementation of the *early language improvement in the kindergarten* is a matter for the kindergartens only and the competences are not shared between the elementary schools and kindergartens. Also, the children are not tested any longer at the elementary school, a place that is new and unfamiliar to them, but instead they are observed in the kindergartens, a place they already know and that they are used to. After the language assessment there is still one year left before the assessed children attend their first day at school. Hence, the kindergarten teachers can use the remaining time reasonably to improve the language competence of children who show an insufficient command of German. Additionally, the language assessment and language improvement measures in the kindergartens indicate that the kindergartens are accepted as educational institutions and have a certain important educational mandate. As a disadvantage of the language assessment with BESK and SSFB it was stated that the kindergarten teachers had only a short time to introduce themselves into the observation with the tools and that the language assessment itself involved a lot of extra work (cf. ibid.).

The second evaluation by Stanzel-Tischler (ibid.) was concerned with qualified and practically experienced kindergarten personnel, who had been attending a seminar at a teacher college or who had been introduced into the BESK and/or the SSFB as support persons. The people surveyed had also worked practically with the BESK and/or SSFB and had assessed the language competence of the preschoolers in their kindergarten groups (Stanzel-Tischler, 2009). Although the introduction of BESK and SSFB was quite precipitate, most of the participants evaluated the assessment tools positively. The language assessments were altogether seen as a good way to make the kindergarten teachers aware of the broad topic language and the use

of standardised tools makes it possible to compare the linguistic competence of preschoolers between the Austrian provinces. (Stanzel-Tischler, 2009).

Nevertheless, there were also a number of critical comments on the observation items, the modalities of the observation, the analysis and interpretation as well as the language improvements connected with the language assessment. Two examples that can be mentioned at this point are the considerable amount of time that is needed to do the language assessment as well as the missing link between the assessment results and the subsequent language improvements. Stanzel-Tischler (*ibid.*) advises the authors of the BESK and SSFB to check the significant points and to include them in a revised and modified version of the instruments (*ibid.*).

Further steps

A very prominent problem of the newly developed observation tools is affecting quite a number of children in Austria:¹⁵ Language assessments with the BESK and SSFB are only conditionally appropriate for children who speak German as their second language (Buttaroni, 2008; Stanzel-Tischler, 2009). The developed tools are only concerned with the German language and do not include the peculiarities of the language competence of children who grow up with a first language other than German. Therefore, an additional language assessment tool is needed that will be able to determine the German language competence of bilingual children or children with German as their second language.

Currently, the BIFIE is developing a language assessment tool for children with a migration background. The new tool, called BESK-DaZ (Breit and Schneider, 2009e), takes the differences and difficulties into account regarding the language acquisition of children with German as their second language. The BESK-DaZ consists of three parts: A, B and C. The context data in part A helps the kindergarten teachers to determine the social and language background of each child. It includes, for example, information about the first and family language(s) as well as the contact time and intensity of contact with the German language. As in the BESK and SSFB, the items in part B and C are assigned to the linguistic qualifications and are assessed by means of a systematic observation. Part B covers the qualifications phonology, lexicon/semantics, and pragmatics/discourse. Part C includes items concerning the qualifications morphology and syntax.

In contrast with the BESK and SSFB, the morphosyntactic part in the BESK-DaZ is based on a phase model (Grießhaber, 2005; Thoma and Tracy, 2007; Kaltenbacher and Klages, 2007; Rothweiler, 2007) that describes systematically the morphosyntactic stages or milestones that children obtain while they acquire German as their second language. Due to their language competence, each child can be assigned to one of five phases by identifying the position of the finite verb and the subject as well as taking a close look at the use of the determiners. In contrast to the BESK and SSFB, the use of the phase model makes it possible to assess the German language competence of children at any age and not only of children at the age of 4 to 5 (Schneider, Rössl and Wanka 2009).

¹⁵ In 2007/08, 21% of the Austrian primary school students had German as a second language (cf. Statistik Austria, 2009)

In future, the assessment tool BESK-DaZ will be used for all children with a migration background, supplementary to the BESK and SSFB. A first version of the language assessment tool (Breit and Schneider, 2009e) and the corresponding handbook (Breit, 2009c) were already piloted in kindergartens in Vienna, Salzburg and Tyrol in summer 2009. Currently, the instrument is being revised by the authors in order to get a version 1.1 that is planned to be applied within the kindergartens in spring 2010.

Conclusion and Prospects

Early language assessments in the kindergarten have to be seen as the basis for individual language improvements. Therefore, appropriate assessment tools are needed in order to find out what language competence a single child has. These tools have to be able to collect all the linguistic qualifications and not only single aspects of the children's language competence. Since 2008, the observation tools BESK and SSFB have been used in most kindergartens in Austria. Because they are based on a current linguistic model, they enable the kindergarten teachers to observe the language competence and to document the language development of preschool children at the age of 4 to 5 in the kindergartens. Although the BESK and SSFB meet the linguistic and methodological criteria of language assessments, further steps are required to assure the quality and to revise and enhance the present language assessment tools.

For the effective use of the language assessment tools, it is firstly very important that further training and seminars will be offered, so that everyone, who is professionally working with the assessment tools, will be well prepared and up to date for the next language assessment (Breit, 2009b; Stanzel-Tischler, 2009). Buttaroni (2008), for instance, is critical of the fact that the kindergarten personnel – instead of specialists, like linguists, language therapists or psychologists – are the ones to do the language assessments with the preschool children in their groups. In order to become experts, the kindergarten teachers have to obtain the essential theoretical background. The kindergarten teachers especially need further education and training in the topics *linguistics, language acquisition, language assessment and language improvement*, so that they can transfer their knowledge into their educational work with the children (Buttaroni, 2008; Ehlich, 2005; Krumm, 2005). So further training courses should be offered. In addition, an academic education for kindergarten teachers is required and has to be initiated as soon as possible (Breit, 2009b).

Furthermore, it is essential to initialise a connection between language assessments and language improvements. At this point it is also important to draw a borderline between language improvement and language therapy. The kindergarten personnel cannot differentiate between language impairments, language disorders or language delay, even if they already have a linguistic background. If they observe noticeable problems, they should inform the parents and advise them to visit a language therapist (Buttaroni, 2008; Hellrung, 2006).

Moreover, the general conditions in the kindergartens have to be enhanced. Only a high quality education enables the individual support of every single child. Therefore, the size of the kindergarten groups has to be reduced and the ratio of kindergarten teachers to children has to be optimised. With the help of extra personnel the kindergarten teachers

could either observe passively or conduct the assessment actively as well as concentrating on the language improvement of certain children. Moreover, they could better exchange information and experiences with their colleagues and discuss problems and uncertainties (Stanzel-Tischler, 2009).

It is also essential that it be understood that single language assessments are only a momentary survey of the language competence of a child. A second language assessment after 6–8 months is advisable, because repeated language assessments point to the success of the language improvements that have been conducted in the kindergartens so far (Ehlich, 2005). Also, the assessment tools and modalities as well as the language improvements have to be revised and enhanced in order to improve the quality continuously (Breit, 2009b).

Last but not least, the parents of those children who do not attend a kindergarten have to be contacted because every other child, who is not attending an educational institution, has a need for language improvement (*ibid.*). The concerns of early language assessments have to be communicated to those parents. Very valuable in this respect is the introduction of the free-of-charge kindergarten year in autumn 2009 and the compulsory kindergarten year in all of the federal provinces of Austria from autumn 2010.¹⁶

¹⁶ see i.e. Federal Ministry Economy, Family and Youth (BMWFJ) [online]: <http://www.bmwfj.gv.at> [21 Juli, 2009]

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Changing policy and an innovative response: Teaching, learning and assessing Irish using mobile phones

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Abstract

The majority of students at post-primary level in Ireland study Irish. The Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate state examinations include an oral component for Irish. In the case of the Junior Certificate, the oral examination is optional, while for the Leaving Certificate it is compulsory.

In 2007, in a bid to increase the use and knowledge of Irish as a community language, the Minister for Education and Science substantially increased the proportion of marks allocated to the oral language components of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. In response to this announcement, the NCCA initiated a pilot project investigating the use of mobile phones to assist in the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish, in a blended learning environment. The aims of the project included increasing student use of Irish, in and outside of school, improving student competency in Irish and investigating the potential of the technologies for formative and summative oral assessment.

This paper traces the policy change which led to the initiation of the FÓN project. Following two pilot projects, involving nearly 400 students in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, much has been learned about the potential of mobile phones as teaching, learning and assessment tools.

Introduction

Ireland has two official languages under its constitution (1922); Irish is the first official language of Ireland, and English the second. Irish gained recognition as an official language of the EU on 1 January 2007. The most recent census in Ireland (2006) revealed that 40.8% of the population indicated that they could speak Irish. Approximately 3% of Ireland's population use Irish as the main community and household language.

Irish is a compulsory subject in primary and post-primary education. Exemptions from learning Irish are only given on the basis of certain learning disabilities or to students who have lived abroad or do not speak English. Irish is examined through state examinations at two stages during second level schooling – the Junior Certificate examination and the Leaving Certificate examination. Both of these examinations include a written and aural (listening comprehension) component for Irish. The oral component is optional for the Junior Certificate examination and compulsory for the Leaving Certificate examination.

In 2007, the Minister for Education and Science announced an increase in the proportion of marks to be allocated to the oral Irish state examinations. These increases were made in an attempt to promote the communicative use of Irish in schools and to foster oral competence in Irish among students (Department of Education and Science, 2007).

At the same time, the Minister requested that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) investigate technological solutions which could assist in providing the optional oral Irish Junior Certificate examination to students. In response to this request in 2007, the NCCA embarked on the first phase of work on integrating mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. This phase of work was referred to as MALL – Mobile-Assisted Language Learning. In 2008, the pilot project was extended to more schools and improvements were made to the underlying technology. This phase of work was referred to the FÓN project. FÓN is the Irish word for ‘telephone’ and stands for Foghlaim Ón Nuatheicneolaíocht or Learning through new Technology.

This article traces the status of Irish in Ireland and examines government initiatives and commitments to preserving and promoting the language. Student learning of Irish through the education system and attitude towards it are examined. Through one of the government’s initiatives to promote Irish and in an attempt to bridge the gap between student interest and motivation for learning Irish, the MALL and FÓN projects were founded. These projects investigated the integration of mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. The aims, design and findings from these projects are discussed.

Irish language policy and statements

Article 8 of the Constitution of Ireland (1922) places Irish as the national language and the first official language of Ireland. English is recognised as a second official language. Positive adult¹ interest in and motivation toward retaining the language has remained constant over the years (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009).²

The Irish Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) makes provision for education through the medium of Irish, for Irish language textbooks and materials. The act also makes provision for the education system to contribute to the extension of bilingualism in Irish society and for greater use of Irish in the community and at home.

The Official Languages Act was passed in 2003, and makes provision for the delivery of public services through Irish. This provision was put in place to ensure a “better availability and higher standard of public services through Irish” (Department of Gaeltacht and Rural Affairs, 2003: 1). The act specifies certain key public services and documents which should be delivered in Irish or bilingually in English and Irish.

A Statement on the Irish Language (Government of Ireland, 2006) was issued in 2006, in which the Irish government affirmed its support for the preservation and development of the Irish language. As a spoken community language, Irish is unique to Ireland and of importance to the identity of the Irish people. The statement commits to ensuring that as many Irish citizens as possible are bilingual in English and Irish. A 20 year strategy is to be developed based on the 13 objectives and vision set out in the document.

¹ Respondents were aged 18 years or older.

² Mac Gréil carried out similar analyses in Ireland in 1972/3, 1988/9 and 2007/8.

The Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland was completed in 2007 (Council of Europe and Department of Education and Science, 2007). The profile drew together all strands of language education in Ireland. With reference to Irish, the policy referred to the importance attached to Irish and the positive perspective of Irish held by students in Irish-medium schools. This was counteracted by the statement that although Irish is a compulsory school subject, “in all too many cases, it does not lead to a reasonable level of communicative ability in the language” (Council of Europe and Department of Education and Science, 2007: 11), even after an estimated 1500 hours of Irish learning in school. The policy also made reference to the dearth of opportunities available to use the language and the rare use of the spoken language among those who have learnt Irish as a second language. This was confirmed in a recent study, which measured reasonable competence among adults in Irish at 47% but regular use of Irish among this cohort at 23% (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009). The authors cite the importance of filling the gap between competent speakers and their use of the language as a matter of priority for the “revival and preservation of Irish” (Mac Gréil and Rhatigan, 2009: 3).

In 2007, the Minister for Education and Science announced a change to the proportion of marks which were to be awarded to the oral assessment of Irish in state examinations. The increase in weighting to be attributed to the oral examination was substantial. As mentioned above, the oral examination is optional for the Junior Certificate examination, and compulsory for the Leaving Certificate examination (regardless of the level students are studying – higher, ordinary, foundation or Leaving Certificate Applied).

Table 1: Changes to the marks to be awarded for the oral component of the Irish state examinations

	Current arrangements			Revised arrangements			Take effect
	Oral	Aural	Written	Oral	Aural	Written	
JC Optional Oral	20%	25%	55%	40%	10%	50%	2010
LC Higher Level	25%	16.7%	58.3%	40%	10%	50%	2012
LC Ordinary Level	25%	20%	55%	40%	10%	50%	2012
LC Foundation Level	25%	30%	45%	40%	20%	40%	2012
LC Applied	33%	30%	37%	40%	25%	35%	2011/ 2012

JC: Junior Certificate; LC: Leaving Certificate

The shift in emphasis to the oral component of the examination, has led to a reduction in the emphasis previously placed on the aural component. The marks attributed to the written component have been slightly reduced.

The assessment of receptive skills (including aural skills) is a component of the examination in which students with lower levels of proficiency have generally performed well. The oral assessment component, involves the assessment of more demanding productive language skills. Students with lower levels of proficiency have usually not performed as well in these skills; the change in weighting could impact the examination performance of these students.

While the increased emphasis placed on competence was welcomed, concern was expressed at the ability and readiness schools have to facilitate an oral Irish examination for Junior Certificate.

Heretofore, the uptake of the oral Irish examination for Junior Certificate has been low as teachers are reluctant to examine their own students in a state examination context (the oral examinations for Leaving Certificate are facilitated by external examiners). Issues of equality of access and opportunity were also raised; as more schools are likely to take up the optional oral examination, the gap between schools which do and do not facilitate the examination could widen.

In tandem with the change to marks, the Minister also announced that technological solutions would be investigated by the NCCA, to assist schools in providing the optional Junior Certificate oral Irish examination. In the same speech, the Minister pointed out that students are “most likely to embrace the language and develop enthusiasm for learning language if it is packaged in the context of youth culture and technological communications” (Department of Education and Science, 2007: not paginated).

Irish through the education system

Irish is a compulsory subject in first level (primary school) and second level (post-primary or secondary school) education. As mentioned previously, exemptions can be obtained from Irish in certain circumstances. In 2006, some 11,871 students were exempted from studying Irish across first and second level education.

The focus of the Primary School Curriculum (1999) for Irish is on the communicative use of Irish. The recent Primary Curriculum Review (NCCA, 2008) in which Irish was one of the subjects being reviewed, showed that children’s attitudes to and enjoyment of learning Irish had improved as a result of the increased emphasis placed on the communicative use of Irish through games, song and rhyme in the revised curriculum. Unfortunately, less emphasis on language structure and grammar has resulted in children’s levels of progression in Irish decreasing. These findings were corroborated through the Department of Education and Science’s (DES) review of Irish (DES, 2007).

When students move on into secondary school, the teaching and learning of Irish can be quite examination-orientated. As they progress through their time in secondary school, their perception of the usefulness of learning Irish diminishes (Smyth, Dunne, McCoy and Darmody, 2006). Irish was reported to be one of the least favourite subjects of 32% of students (Smyth et al, 2006). In 2007, the Minister also made reference to students’ acceptance of “the popular notion that learning Irish is boring and that it is a difficult language” (DES, 2007).

It has been reported that the number of native Irish speakers is declining (Ó Giollagáin, Mac Donnacha, Ní Chualáin, Ní Shéaghda & O’Brien, 2007). Consequently, more and more emphasis is being placed on the capacity of the education system to equip students with a communicative competence in Irish.

In line with the government’s drive to promote oral competence in Irish, instil confidence in students in learning Irish and increase its knowledge as a community language, an initiative was needed which would draw students’ interest towards Irish and increase their opportunity for speaking it.

Bridging the gap between student interest and an old language

The Minister has referred to the necessity of capturing students' imagination and attention, and packaging Irish in the "context of youth culture". Students are becoming more and more connected in their personal lives, through online social networks, email and their mobile phones. Through the evaluation process attached to the FÓN project³ (discussed below), it was revealed that 99% of students owned a mobile phone and that a majority (81%) of them use their mobile phones to send text messages, rather than the more expensive alternative of making calls. 96% of these same students had a computer at home (92% with internet access). Students indicated that they mostly used their internet-connected computers at home for music (91%), finding information (86%) and social networking (80%).

While student attitude associated with immersion or Irish-medium education has been shown to be positive, those students learning Irish in English-medium schools have been shown to be less enthusiastic. If we now examine the needs of these students for learning Irish, we have ascertained that they need greater opportunities to speak Irish in more realistic settings, they need to be shown that Irish can be more enjoyable and modern, that Irish can be taken and used beyond the school setting and helped to improve their competence in the language. These student requirements line up with three factors which were outlined as being required to maintain community languages, and preserve linguistic vitality and linguistic diversity. These are (1) the capacity to use a given language, (2) the opportunity to use it and (3) the desire to use it (Grin and Moring, 2002).

Oral language can be difficult for teachers to assess when limited to the confines of a 40 minute class session each day. While many teachers opt to teach Irish through the language itself, as is advised, it can be difficult to create enough opportunities for students to use their own Irish. While it is important to get students chatting, it is equally important for teachers to be able to monitor this process.

So how can the learning and interest needs of the students be met, while also meeting the needs of teachers?

Innovation and novelty: Mobile phones

"I enjoyed using phones, as it made Irish interesting and fun!! For once, I didn't mind doing Irish homework"

(FÓN Project Student)

The MALL project

In 2007, the NCCA embarked on a pilot project to integrate mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish. The initial phase of work was call MALL

³ N=293

(Mobile-Assisted Language Learning). The idea for using mobile phones in this way stemmed from students in the initial project school. When asked how Irish could be made more exciting, they suggested new and novel ways for learning and practising it including the use of their much favoured mobile phones.

NCCA worked in association with the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) to supply the three classes of second year students (the year prior to the year when students sit the Junior Certificate examination) in the one pilot project school, with mobile phones. One class set of networked laptops was also provided. Excluding teacher training time, the project actively ran in the school for five weeks.

The mobile phones were used in two ways:

1. to deliver daily vocabulary word and phrase SMSs to students
2. to allow students to dial up to a phone system, which presented them with a series of questions in Irish. Students left their recorded responses to these questions, which were later accessed by their teacher online. Students could revise each answer as often as they wished, before submitting their final response to any one question.

Teachers had the opportunity to listen back to student recordings online and provide feedback on them. This feedback was accessed by students who could podcast the original question, with their recorded answer and any associated teacher feedback.

All content within the phone system, was designed by the teachers involved. It was also differentiated for all levels of learner. As students were all supplied with their own mobile phone for the project, they could access the MALL system during school hours, but also outside of school hours, any time and any place.

Teachers' reflections on MALL

The three teachers' responses to the pilot project were very positive. They felt that students were more confident and had improved self-esteem about their level of Irish – they could confidently leave recorded answers, and knew that only their teacher would hear them. They felt that students also experienced a greater sense of freedom about their Irish learning – they could log in anytime and anywhere, and were enabled to be more autonomous learners. They emphasised that these positive features were particularly beneficial for students with lower competency levels than others.

Teachers also referred to students' improvement in competence – not just oral competence, but also increased vocabulary, improved comprehension and better use of tenses. The MALL system had given students the opportunity to practise as often as they wanted to – leading to more frequent use of the language, in turn leading to improvements in competency. Teachers referred to students' ability to grasp new topics faster when using the MALL system, compared to when they were using more traditional methods in the classroom.

Students were so enthusiastic about the receipt of vocabulary SMSs, that they requested that teachers send them to their personal mobile phones during the school summer holidays.

Teachers also praised the MALL system's ability in allowing them to hear all students' oral production, even those who would usually be shy in class. The teachers themselves were extremely positive about the alternative way of providing electronic feedback to students on their oral production - something which they would usually have had to use a lot of class time to facilitate.

While many benefits were associated with the system, a few challenges were also identified by teachers. Naturally, the more students used the system and recorded themselves, the greater the time teachers needed to invest in listening back and providing feedback on responses. Teachers also suggested a few amendments to the system to speed up the process of providing feedback to students. These suggestions were integrated into the next phase of work – the FÓN project.

Students' reflections on MALL

Students' own reflections were equally positive. They appreciated the any time, any place access to the MALL system to practise their Irish. They also praised the more autonomous opportunity for their learning through this feature. The MALL system provided them with an opportunity to speak Irish outside of school, where the majority of students would not usually have access to an Irish speaker at home. They liked being able to listen back to their answer and revise it before submitting the final production they were satisfied with. The integration of mobile phones into their learning environment proved a very positive shift from more traditional methods used. They felt that it was a more fun, up to date and novel way to teach the language and their levels of enjoyment for speaking and learning Irish improved as a result. Increases in enjoyment levels were also attributed to the variety of questions that students heard through the system, the reduction in pressure of not having to answer in front of their class and the challenge associated with speaking Irish so frequently. The increased emphasis on oral, rather than written Irish, was also welcomed – “the phones were good and helped me speak better Irish, rather than writing it down all the time”.

Students made many references to their increase in competency as a result of using their Irish so frequently. They referred to increases in vocabulary and ease of speaking in Irish, to their enhanced ability to understand Irish and to notice the mistakes that they made. Students' references to their improved fluency were common responses. As students felt that their competency in Irish improved, their levels of enjoyment improved equally.

Students also identified challenges with the MALL system, most of which referred to the quality of the recordings of the questions they were to answer, keeping track of their log-in details and dropped calls. Again – this feedback carried through to improvements made to the system within the FÓN project.

The FÓN project

The FÓN project was initiated in 2008 and drew on the challenges and recommendations gathered from the MALL project. The participating cohort was increased to six schools, three in Northern Ireland and three in the Republic of Ireland, totalling 16 teachers and 368 students. Foras na Gaeilge joined the NCCA and NCTE partnership for this phase

of the pilot project. The project cohort was divided into two user groups. After teacher training, group one worked actively on the project for the initial 11 weeks across 2008/9, and group two worked actively on the project for the second 11 week period in 2009.

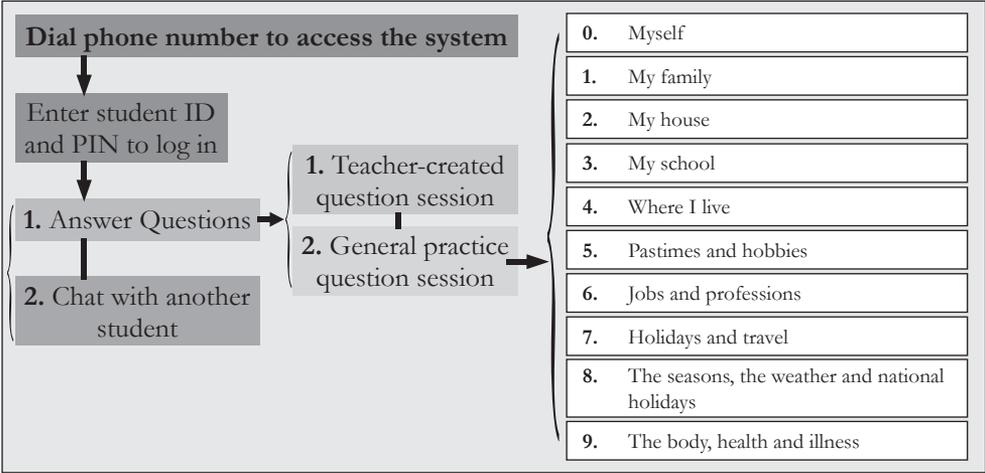
Two substantial changes were made to the phone system:

1. A third use of mobile phones was added – students could now access the system and talk with other students participating in the project. Again, all work carried out over the phone was recorded for later access by the teacher. When students were connected to chat with one another they received a recorded prompt from their teacher which acted as the discussion topic. This replicated a role-play scenario where each student took up a role to play in the conversation.
2. More content and questions were made available through the system. Teachers could also customise the questions their students received by pulling a custom session together from the system content and/or recording their own questions for addition to the system. This meant that teachers could customise content for all levels of student and also draw together custom exam/test sessions for students to complete.

The FÓN project also saw the addition of extra features to the teachers’ online interface and a new student online interface. Here, students could access all of the questions they had answered over the phone, listen back to their answers, listen back to conversations they had with other students, access any teacher feedback on their recordings and see a listing of all of the vocabulary words and phrases they received to their mobile phones by SMS. The questions were recorded in a recording studio to ensure the volume and quality of the recordings was as high as possible. National celebrities volunteered their time to read out the questions for recording. This facet added an additional novelty factor.

Figure 1 below outlines how students accessed the appropriate element of the FÓN system when they dialled up using their mobile phones. Where a number precedes an option in the figure, it indicates where the student presses the relevant number to make a selection. The themes listed to the right reflect the contents of the Irish syllabus for Junior Certificate and are also relevant to the Northern Ireland GCSE examination.

Figure 1: Phone interface of the FÓN system



The FÓN project was more rigorously evaluated than the MALL project. Specifically, teacher and student pre- and post-project questionnaires, teacher reflective diaries and observation during site visits were adopted. It was not possible to gauge students' competency before the project. Consequently, reported improvements are those which were perceived by teachers and students. The positive findings reported from the MALL project, were also present for the FÓN project. Fewer challenges were reported.

The sample size and response rates for the teacher and student questionnaires are indicated below.

Table 2: Response rates and sample size

	Pre-project		Post-project	
	Response rate	Sample size	Response rate	Sample size
Teachers	75%	N=12	50%	N=8
Students	80%	N=293	72%	N=265

Teachers' reflections on FÓN

The majority of teachers were positive about the integration of the FÓN technologies into their classrooms and students' learning environment. They referred to students' improved competence as they had had the opportunity to practise topics often and sequentially. This led to improvements in fluency, vocabulary, recognition of different Irish dialects and accents, and increased use of tenses and verbs. The progress that students made across their recordings from the start of the project to the end of the project was substantial. Students progressed from providing short, stilted answers, to more fluent and complex answers to the questions posed.

Between the teachers' pre- and post- project questionnaires, teachers' perceptions of their students' competency improved. They changed from 27% *very good* at speaking and 36% *good* before the project, to 75% *very good* at speaking and 25% *good* at speaking. The improvement to teachers' perceptions of students' listening ability also improved. They changed from 9% *very good*, 18% *good* and 64% *ok*, to 50% *very good* and 50% *good*. Interestingly, reading and writing also showed marked improvements from the pre-project questionnaire to the post-project questionnaire.

Teachers also referred to students' enhanced ability to take charge of their own learning through the FÓN system. The system eased the balance between the teacher's and student's role in teaching and learning, with the teachers becoming facilitators and the students taking more responsibility for their learning.

Teachers noted students' growing enthusiasm and enjoyment for Irish through their use of the FÓN system. Students were noted to be accessing the FÓN system multiple times per day and late into the evening and night. Motivation levels rose on par with enjoyment; one teacher said that the motivation levels in his class had "gone through the roof!" Teachers referred to students' improved levels of engagement with Irish and how it was easier to hold their attention on one task for an entire class using the FÓN technologies compared to the more traditional methods previously utilised. Improvements in confidence came from the increased opportunity for students to practise and become more comfortable

with speaking Irish (away from the peer pressures of the classroom).

Again, teachers perceived an improvement in students' levels of enjoyment of Irish between the pre- and post-project questionnaire. The figures changed from 14% *really enjoy learning Irish*, 36% *enjoy learning Irish* and 43% *think Irish is ok*, to 13% *really enjoy learning Irish* and 88% *enjoy learning Irish* after the project. One of the teachers involved referred to his class being more enthusiastic when they came into Irish class and always asking whether they were using the phones that day. All teachers stated that their classes were more motivated to learn and speak Irish as a result of using the FÓN technologies and that they felt that they had enjoyed learning Irish more.

Teachers made reference to students' familiarity with mobile phones and how their use for Irish added a novelty factor. While teachers often needed to refer to their log-in details from a notebook, students were able to input theirs and work through the phone interface without any reference point needed.

Teachers noted how the FÓN system enabled Irish to travel beyond the classroom and raised the profile of the language in students' homes. Irish became a living language rather than a subject taught in school. It was through student to student conversations and the opportunity for meaningful interaction in Irish that the latter benefit became most evident. 100% of the teachers stated that students used more Irish through the integration of the FÓN technologies than they had before.

In terms of assessment, teachers welcomed the opportunity to monitor student oral production and check-in on oral work completed outside of the Irish class. Teachers were able to monitor students over time and hear the progression in the quality of their answers. Reference was also made to students' ability to self-assess their level of Irish through re-recording their answers until they were happy with them and through comparing their level of Irish with the students they were paired up to chat with.

Teachers reported that the FÓN system provided great opportunities for students to speak and practise Irish. They felt it could suitably facilitate an oral examination for all of the class at one time, which the teachers could access and work through at a later stage. They did feel that some of the cues and interaction which a student and examiner would have in a face-to-face scenario would be lost through using the FÓN system. However, they felt that this might prove more beneficial for shyer students or students with less competency, especially if they had been using the system to practise previously.

63% of teachers felt that the FÓN technologies had impacted on the way they assess their students. They found it effective not only for monitoring oral progression, but also for monitoring grammar, syntax and vocabulary.

100% of teachers felt that the FÓN technologies offer possibilities for practising for an oral examination, while 75% feel it could be used to facilitate an oral examination. The only negative extension to the latter response was that it may be a little impersonal for students to take an oral examination through the FÓN technologies.

Students' reflections on FÓN

Students reported that they were more at ease and comfortable speaking Irish than they had been before taking part in the FÓN project. They referred to their increased competency – in the same areas as teachers had noticed. Students added that using the FÓN technologies had helped them to effectively prepare for their term tests.

The same improvements in perceived competence reported by teachers were also reported by the students. Students' perceptions of their competence across the four skills improved between the pre- and post- project questionnaires. Students' perceptions of their speaking skills improved from 8% *very good* in the pre-project questionnaires, to 22% *very good* in the post-project questionnaires. There was a similar increase in the proportion of students who perceived their listening skills to be better after the project. 73% of students reported that they felt their Irish had improved more as a result of participating in the project.

Students reported finding that the FÓN technologies made Irish more fun, enjoyable and interesting. They preferred this new, more up to date way of learning Irish compared to more traditional methods. They felt that it was easier to complete homework assignments using their phones rather than needing to carry books home or complete written assignments. They made reference to how practising Irish through the FÓN system “feels less like work”. They also made reference to their ability to access the FÓN system at any time and from anywhere.

88% of students said that they had enjoyed using the FÓN technologies for learning and practising Irish. The reasons given were that it was something different to what they usually did (27%), it was exciting and interesting (27%) and that they had learnt more Irish or improved a particular skill during the activity (17%). When asked to describe a learning activity that they had particularly enjoyed, 58% of students referred to the FÓN project. The reasons provided were that it was fun, something different to more traditional methods, that they had learnt more than usual and that they were able to talk to other people. The second most frequently cited activity was the use of games such as word searches or crosswords (17%).

78% of students reported speaking and using more Irish than they had before participating in the project. Their reasons included: their ability to use their mobile phones from home to speak Irish, the learning emphasis being moved from writing to speaking and the feeling that their ability had improved and they were therefore more likely to use their Irish. Some of the students' responses included “it was enjoyable to do so I looked forward to doing it in the evenings” and “we had a full conversation and I could understand”.

The highlight of the FÓN system for students was the function which allowed them to talk to other students. Students frequently referred to this as allowing them to speak Irish outside of school, chat with their friends in Irish and make new friends.

Students referred positively to the feature which allowed them to listen back to their answers and re-record them. This indicates that the students attributed a level of quality to their Irish production, and self-assessed whether it was necessary to re-record their answers – “I can hear my mistakes and try to do better”. Students made reference to being able to

use the FÓN system to reinforce what had been learnt in class, and make sure that they had fully grasped the topic. They felt that the FÓN system had helped them to prepare for an oral examination as well as improve their overall competence. As mentioned above, students gauged their level of Irish against other students they chatted with through the system.

The instructions for navigating the phone interface outlined in Figure 1 above were delivered through Irish. While this presented somewhat of a barrier to students to begin with, they were soon able to work their way to their desired activity quickly.

72% of students indicated that they would like to continue using the FÓN technologies, and 94% would recommend that other students should be given the opportunity to work with the FÓN technologies.

Conclusions

There is a lot of support for maintaining Irish as a living and spoken language. However, it is the next generation which this task will fall to in years to come so it is essential that their enthusiasm for and competence in Irish is nurtured. The majority of Irish citizens learn Irish through the education system. It is important that the enjoyment experienced by primary school children learning Irish carries through to students' post-primary school experience. Building progression in students' communicative competence across the levels is also key.

A change in policy can be the trigger for new and effective initiatives. It is evident that matching a popular tool to an unpopular subject can have a positive effect on students' perceptions of the subject. In the case of the MALL and FÓN projects, the introduction of mobile phones into the teaching, learning and assessment of Irish led to improvements in student competency, attitude and motivation.

The technologies provided opportunities for students to practise their oral Irish and converse with other students. The potential to use these technologies to facilitate a state examination has yet to be tested, but the evidence suggests that those students and teachers who have experienced the potential of the technologies for Irish, are eager to continue using them.

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Linguistic diversity challenges in the school system in Spain

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Abstract

Within a context of increasing international migration flows and growing multilingualism in schools, this paper aims to examine the educational policy and, more precisely, the linguistic policy implemented in Spain in order to face this new linguistic reality. This paper presents an overview of the linguistic educational programmes established for that purpose, focusing on the teaching of the language of instruction, the Language and Culture of Origin (LCO) programme, and the current Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programme, designed to foster the learning, use and spread of English as an integral part of the curriculum.

This paper also explores the underlying ideological assumptions concerning these policies (especially the views on linguistic diversity, and on intergroup relationships), together with their consequences for the education of minority students. When analysing these issues, some contradictions between policies and practices will arise, since the first ones are presented as integrative and intercultural, while programmes which contravene these practices are being created and implemented. Furthermore, this overview brings the existence of a hierarchy in the valuation of students' background and languages of origin to light.¹

Turning Linguistic Attention to Foreign Students in the Spanish Education system

In modern societies there are a large number of converging phenomena which foster mobility and entail growing diversity. Among them, we may mention globalisation, exchanges, migrations and the emergence of supranational political structures. All these factors have contributed to the increase of linguistic diversity in western societies – a diversity which, far from being new, has nowadays become more obvious and open, bringing about some relevant changes in social life as well as in the relationships between communities.

In the last decade, the presence of students with a migrant background in the Spanish education system, even though relatively small in comparison with other European countries, has experienced a considerable growth. Thus, according to figures provided by the Ministry of Education,² in the academic year 2007-2008 the number of students with a migrant background enrolled in non-university education reached 9.3%, having increased their number at all educational levels, particularly since 2001-2002.

¹ This paper has been written within the framework of the R&D Project: *Multilingualism in Schools: a Critical Sociolinguistic Analysis of Educational Linguistics Programs in the Madrid Region* (HUM2007-64694), financed by the National Plan of R&D&I of the Ministry of Science and Technology of Spain and directed by Professor Luisa Martín Rojo, and thanks to the invitation made by the Area of Studies and Research of the Institute for Teacher Training, Research and Innovation (IFPIIE), Ministry of Education.

² *Evolución y situación actual de la presencia del alumnado extranjero en el sistema educativo español (1997-2008)* (Evolution and current situation of the presence of students with a migrant background in the Spanish education system (1997-2008)). CREADE-IFPIIE. Available at: <https://www.educacion.es/creade/IrASubSeccionFront.do?id=1201>

The Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration 2007-2010,³ a basic document on immigration policy with national scope, put forward a series of measures aimed at guaranteeing quality compulsory education, which is accessible to everyone and provided under equal conditions. In order to do this, the Plan establishes a number of programmes to prevent segregation and absenteeism in schools, to inform immigrants about the Spanish education system, to promote the development of intercultural knowledge and competences, to promote coexistence and social cohesion, and to facilitate immigrant students' access to non-compulsory and adult education. Programmes to welcome and integrate immigrants into the education system are also included, as well as others for educational support and reinforcement - to learn the language of the host community and to maintain the language and culture of the country of origin.

The May 3rd Act on Education 2/2006(LOE), which regulates the Spanish Education System, states that public administrations are responsible for the integration of students who, due to their coming from a different country or to any other reason, incorporate late into the system. Furthermore, each Autonomous Community is responsible for the development of specific programmes designed for students who, according to the legislation, "show severe linguistic deficiencies or shortcomings in their basic knowledge and competences", so as to facilitate their integration into the corresponding course or level.

In spite of these provisions made by the law, we cannot claim that the education administrations have a specific legal framework of reference concerning linguistic attention to students, since the legislation which establishes linguistic guidelines, as well as the nature and rank of norms themselves, is extremely heterogeneous. In some cases, measures are included in laws, in many others they appear in models or in general plans, and sometimes actions are regulated through decrees, resolutions, instructions, bulletins, etc. Therefore, we might say that the diversity of measures currently under way, as well as the organisational models designed to implement them, are a natural consequence of the variety and heterogeneity which can be found in legislation itself.

Notwithstanding the diversity perceived in the legislative framework, the following are the most common linguistic attention measures:

- Welcome programmes.
- Programmes to teach the language of the host community.
- Programmes to teach the language and culture of origin.
- Programmes to provide information to immigrant families about the Spanish education system and to encourage their participation in the educational process of their children as well as in the activities developed by the educational community.
- Support and mediation in cultural and/or school issues.
- Translation and interpretation support services.

Most welcome programmes set up by the Autonomous Communities are specifically addressed at under-age, unaccompanied immigrant students (Canary Islands) or students who incorporate late into the Spanish education system (Balearic Islands). Other welcome

³ Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration 2007-2010. Agreement signed by the Council of Ministers. Ministry of Employment and Immigration. Government of Spain.

programmes have been designed to provide attention for all the students entering the system, which is the case in Castilla La Mancha. These programmes usually include measures taken by schools prior to the reception of new students, such as the inclusion of values of intercultural education in the school project and in other school documents, teacher training in those specific values, the adaptation of school resources (working spaces, schedules and teacher provision) or the elaboration of informative documentation in several languages. Furthermore, details about the new students and their families are gathered by the school. The school, in turn, informs them about the education system and the characteristics of the institution itself. Classroom activities to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between students are also encouraged. Therefore, the welcome plan not only covers linguistic and curricular aspects, but also attitudinal (raising cultural awareness) and contextual issues, focusing on the socio-linguistic integration of students who are not familiar with the language of the host community.

A further measure to promote integration and participation in schools has been the addition of mediation, translation and interpretation services. Most Autonomous Communities include provision for intercultural mediators and/or translators and interpreters in their plans. On many occasions, the same professional in charge of mediation in schools also acts as an interpreter or a translator. Translation and interpretation services are usually external to schools, and their operation and scope depend on local or autonomous resources.

The teaching of the host community language, a necessary tool to gain access to all curricular areas and to develop the competences required in the current European framework, comprises two types of initiatives to foster linguistic development, namely, language classrooms and other measures for curricular and linguistic reinforcement. Many communities have opened initial language immersion classrooms in order to promote and improve linguistic competence in the corresponding language (for example, the so-called Link Classrooms within the programme “Welcome Schools” in Madrid, or Welcome Classrooms belonging to the *LIC* Plan – Language, Interculturality and Cohesion – in Catalonia). These types of classes are organised in schools with a sizable immigrant population whose low level of competence in the language of instruction makes it difficult for their educational process to carry on normally.

As regards the teaching of the language and culture of origin (LCO), two previous nationwide programmes must be mentioned, (1) the Portuguese Language and Culture Programme, carried out in cooperation with the Government of Portugal from 1987-1988 onwards, and (2) the Programme for Teaching Arabic Language and Moroccan Culture, initiated in 1994-1995 as a result of an agreement signed with the Kingdom of Morocco. At present, the implementation and development of these programmes falls under the remit of each Autonomous Community. In order to set up and maintain these educational measures, it is advisable to establish cooperation agreements with the countries of origin and with public institutions or private non-profit organisations. Tuition is generally provided during out-of-school hours, although some Communities are considering the possibility of including lessons in the ordinary curriculum. Furthermore, some Communities encourage all students, not only immigrants, to take part in these courses, with the intention of transforming them into intercultural and integration activities instead of segregational measures, geared only towards a culturally isolated fraction of the school population. In

other territories, apart from promoting the creation of LCO programmes, the elaboration of curricular materials is also encouraged.

The analysis of the legal framework regarding linguistic diversity cannot be separated from the complex amalgam of languages which make up the current multilingual school context. A reflection upon this issue appears in the following section.

The Multilingual Reality of Schools: Reflections and Challenges

Students with a migrant background and linguistic diversity

In a multilingual context, the school as an institution plays an essential role. Not only does it reproduce the linguistic configuration of Spain as a whole, it also acts as a representative of the State, of its policies and the ideologies inspiring them. Indeed, the school can be regarded as a microcosm of society, where all its plurality, including linguistic diversity, is represented.

Even though we cannot rely on a census to provide official figures about the total number of speakers of each language in schools, the results of the only research project carried out so far in primary schools in the Autonomous Community of Madrid (Broeder y Mijares, 2003) showed that more than 50 different languages are spoken by pupils, including the official languages of the rest of the Autonomous Communities: Catalan, Basque and Galician. Furthermore, the use of some European languages which enjoy a high international prestige, such as English, French or German, was also registered, as well as the presence of other immigrant languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, Romanian, Tagalog and Polish. Finally, it was also found out that the variant spoken by the Roma population in Spain (caló) is used, together with other dialectal variations of Romani, especially those originating in Eastern Europe and Portugal.

As there is no available data on linguistic diversity in schools and as long as there are no systematic studies, our only alternative is to deduce information on linguistic diversity from the statistics on students with a migrant background elaborated by the Ministry of Education annually. Although these figures refer to nationalities and not to languages – which could lead to an identification error - they can be useful in outlining a linguistic map of Spain depicting what we may call “other languages” spoken in the country. These “other languages” are also referred to as community or additional languages (McPake et al. 2007), non-official or non-heritage languages.

From these statistics we could infer that during the academic year 2005-2006, more than half a million, 50% of the total number of students from another country, used some variety of Spanish, especially those spoken in Ecuador, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Equatorial Guinea or Cuba. These variants are becoming more and more common in schools, thus contributing to an affect on their linguistic configuration. This circumstance has also helped to open a debate over some existing contradictions arising from the assumption that the only correct variety of Spanish is the one spoken in the Peninsula, or even in some specific regions.

In addition, as a result of the presence of a considerable number of students with European Union citizenship – around 13% of students with a migrant background - other languages such as English, French, Italian, German or Portuguese would also have an important representation in schools. Some of them, especially English, French and German, are ranked first among the most prestigious in the region. Consequently, most linguistic policies focus in the acquisition and promotion of these languages, making them accessible to a majority of students, and not only to those who have some kind of connection with the countries where they are spoken.

The number of students coming from European countries outside the EU, reaches a similar percentage. Around 13% of the children with a nationality other than Spanish originally came from countries such as Romania, Bulgaria or Ukraine. For this reason, Slavic languages like Bulgarian or Ukrainian, or Romance languages, like Romanian, are being heard more and more frequently in schools. Similarly, several dialectal varieties from the Romani family would have been added to the existing diversity, thanks to the presence of immigrants from these countries.

Around 20% of the total number of immigrant students came from Africa, mostly Morocco. They bring in Afro-Asiatic languages from the Semitic family, such as Arabic, especially its Moroccan variety. The presence of some African languages of the Bantu family is also worth mentioning. These languages include Bubi, spoken in Equatorial Guinea, Fang, used in Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Gabon, and Wolof, which belongs to the Nigeria-Congo language family, and is spoken, among other places, in Cameroon. Many of the students coming from these countries also use French, which is their second language as well as an important exchange language in their countries. The presence of some pidgin languages might also be mentioned, which are hybrid varieties arising through contact between different languages, in this case, languages with an English and Portuguese basis.

Students from Asia, mostly from China, represent only 3% of the total number of students with a migrant background. They have brought some languages into school from the Sino-Tibetan family, such as Mandarin – the official language of China – and some other variants, particularly from the Zhejiang province. Among this last group we might highlight a variety used in Quintian, a city in the vicinity of Wenzhou, spoken by about 80% of the Chinese immigrants who live in some Autonomous Communities like Madrid and which are not understood by residents in other areas of the same province. It is also important to mention the presence of some Austronesian languages from the Malayo-Polynesian family, such as Tagalog, as well as some Indo-European languages from the Indo-Iranian family, like Hindi and Urdu.

As we will explain later on, from all the languages spoken by immigrants, Arabic (in its standard variety) was the only one being taught in schools. An official programme must be followed and is integrated into regular school hours, until the last academic course. On the other hand, other languages such as Japanese or Chinese, although not part of the provision in ordinary schools, can be learnt thanks to the efforts made by linguistic and cultural institutions which promote their learning. For many years now, the Chinese community, through its own associations, has been offering language courses for native speakers of Chinese, both children and adults. Furthermore, the Polish and Ukrainian

communities have also carried out similar programmes in the weekends, always out of regular school time.

As a result of the large variety of nationalities coexisting in schools, in Spanish classrooms we may hear, among others, Quechua, Wolof, Moroccan Arabic, French, Ukrainian, Romanian, Polish, Mandarin Chinese, Tarifit or Pichinglis. This corroborates the fact that we live in a world where linguistic and cultural diversity are reflected in schools. Moreover, many students with a migrant background, especially those who enter the system at later ages, are trilingual, as, together with their first language, they may speak, for instance, a Sub-Saharan African language, French and some pidgin variety as well; or some other common combinations, such as a Moroccan variety of Arabic, a variety of Berber and French.

However, as Broeder and Mijares (2004) stated, indices of linguistic vitality are low among migrant students. In spite of this linguistic wealth, nothing seems to indicate that all these languages will continue to be a part of the linguistic heritage of these speakers, especially in the case of the younger ones. For young children, the languages of origin are mainly used at home with their parents. These languages are used to a lesser extent with siblings, with whom young children speak Spanish, as they do with the rest of their friends and classmates. Spanish is the most commonly used language, also among adolescents who have not received any formal instruction or support in their language of origin (Martín Rojo, et al., 2008).

Even if these children frequently used their languages of origin at home, if they do not receive any formal instruction in them and their practice is not valued and encouraged, they will not acquire proficiency in writing or become competent in them in other contexts (such as academic or institutional); or perhaps they will only be familiar with dialects which are not useful for them as a language for interchange (which is the case with some varieties of Berber or the dialects of the different provinces in China). When we consider these issues, we must avoid thinking that the students who speak all these languages are foreigners – in fact, many of them have been born in Spain - and that, therefore, their language belongs to them and they are the only ones responsible for keeping it alive. On the contrary, these languages should be regarded as a common heritage, and, from this perspective, they could come in handy in the future for some of these speakers, for instance, to integrate into the job market, or to foster the development of trade and industry in the State as a whole.

The European framework

As a consequence of the growing awareness of the need to appreciate diversity, new policies and actions oriented towards guaranteeing the right and the obligation to learn and use different languages are gradually being devised. Thus, the promotion of migrant languages is receiving increasing attention in EU countries. The aforementioned tendency of immigrants towards giving up the use of their languages of origin obviously indicates that, even though we live in a highly multilingual society, neither the criteria nor the procedures to handle linguistic diversity or the strategies to maintain it and benefit from it have been clearly defined yet.

The origin of these shortcomings can be traced to a series of significant historical processes

which brought about the creation of the modern State. Thus, although linguistic diversity is not a strange occurrence in our societies (none of the European countries is monolingual), it is also true that the deeply rooted association between language and State, born with the French Revolution – although it had already started to develop with the expansion of Castilian Spanish after the discovery of America – contributed to the creation of monolingual states. Behind this search for a linguistic unity, lay a political assumption, still very much in force, that speaking only one language would provide cohesion to the State. There was also a second presupposition, of social and egalitarian nature, also prevailing nowadays - the belief that the existence of a common (dominant) language would help citizens gain access to certain social spheres, such as the school or the parliament, from which some social groups had been traditionally excluded (working classes, ethnic minorities, etc). Until a few decades back, both ideas contributed to the homogenising treatment applied to diversity.

Today, these views have changed and diversity is starting to be regarded as a source of wealth which keeps different ways of understanding society and human experience alive. Likewise, a holistic view on linguistic, cultural and biological diversity has spread, contributing to the recognition that languages are an integral part of the intangible heritage of peoples and cities, and, above all, bridges and ways for mutual understanding and communication.

In view of this modern perspective, new linguistic policies are being formulated. The European Union itself has moved from promoting measures focused exclusively on the languages spoken in nation states and protecting the citizens' right and obligation to learn and use them, to paying attention to regional languages and to those not belonging to a state (e.g. Romani) as well. In recent years, this interest has also shifted to migrant languages.

With reference to this last group, in the 1970s, institutions such as the European Commission recommended the creation of programmes to teach the languages of origin with the intention of preparing the children of immigrant families for a future return to their countries. From around the mid-1990s onwards, there has been a complete change regarding this issue. Nowadays, programmes for teaching languages of origin, as stated in the Report on the education of children of immigrants in the European Union (European Commission, 1995), must serve the purpose of promoting cultural pluralism which considers the development of linguistic skills a goal in itself.

This new way of understanding plurilingualism explains the fact that, in recent years, institutions like the Council of Europe have advised that the educational status of the languages spoken by all students is recognised. This change, however, has not taken place fully yet, and there is a lot of evidence suggesting that, despite these policies, we are still reluctant to treat diversity as something we can benefit from or as a source of wealth, let alone give it an adequate treatment.

The deficit perspective

In view of the current situation of diversity and multilingualism in Spanish schools, we would now like to focus on the measures relating to formal language teaching at non-university education levels. Our intention here is to contribute to the discussion with our analysis of and concerns about these measures, as well as contributing a series of proposals which could

be carried out for the improvement and successful implementation of these measures, while always keeping a perspective of linguistic diversity and interculturality in mind.

One of our sources of concern is, for instance, the fact that the discourse found in national or autonomous legislation, as we mentioned above (Section I), although showing certain signs of improvement in its development and implementation, is still constructed upon an assimilation-oriented ideology. The perception that society is something homogeneous is so deeply rooted that it is commonly assumed that only those who do not differ from the rest are the ones who can “be integrated” or who will be able to progress. Clearly, this is not integration, but assimilation.

Assimilation ideology originates from a deficit theory. This hypothesis regards the “other”, that is, the newcomer in the host community, as someone lacking a series of traits or skills which he/she should have or should acquire, provided that he/she is willing to become a member of the new community. Although not directly stated, the objective to assimilate immigrant families into Spanish society, its norms, behaviour and lifestyle, pervades Spanish legislation and can be clearly perceived (for example, in expressions that specify what type of skills students lack when they enter the system, and how these shortcomings should be compensated). These legislative discourses do not mention any reference whatsoever to competences which these students previously have, such as linguistic and communicative skills. Those skills could also contribute to the enrichment of an already diverse society, if an intercultural and non-assimilationist perspective were applied. In fact, as we will see later on, in many cases this approach may result in adopting segregationist educational measures and procedures. Assimilation and compensatory ideologies are completely opposed to an intercultural ideology, which promotes integration principles for all the educational community, with the intention of making diversity the norm.⁴ Thus, in the discourse of the legislation that aims to incorporate an integration-oriented terminology we can appreciate evident conceptual contradictions, which do not contribute to a clear and precise interpretation of the guidelines and do not, therefore, guarantee the application of principles from an intercultural perspective.

For this reason, a thorough review of the discourse of legislation constitutes, in our opinion, a priority among current challenges. When carrying out this review we should bear in mind what type of ideology, principles and guidelines we want to promote at school and in society in order that, once the contradictions that may appear in political-legislative discourse are identified, that particular legislation can be redefined so as to show coherence between principles, concepts and terminology. This coherence in political guidelines will also bring about a higher coherence in the implementation of measures and programmes, both at schools and at local or regional level.

Reflections upon language teaching at school

The homogenising potential of schools has been highlighted on many occasions. It is in

⁴ As an example of this, see The Regional Plan for Education Compensation in the Autonomous Community of Madrid from 2000, still in force as a General Plan, where certain contradictions appear. The document states that diversity is the norm and an intercultural education must be developed within a Plan designed for students who do not speak Spanish or whose educational level is way below the standard; that is, an intercultural education which is not aimed towards integration and which does not address the school population as a whole.

school where the standard language is taught, where values are learnt and reinforced and where common knowledge is absorbed. Moreover, throughout history school has also acted as an important agent for social selection, since not every social group had access to it or obtained equally successful results. Up to now, many necessary actions have been undertaken in order to universalise education and to provide schooling for all social classes and genders. The incorporation of immigrant students into schools, together with their diversity of languages and cultures, poses a new challenge for an institution which has not completely finished the transformation process we have mentioned above (Section 2).

Leaving aside other questions related to the educational challenges caused by the arrival of these new students, in numerous schools the languages of instruction coexist with many others which cannot be ignored. This situation has already arisen in other European and American countries, showing us the need to initiate programmes and establish measures to handle this diversity, namely: a) programmes to guarantee access to the language of instruction; b) programmes to maintain the languages of origin, and c) programmes to ensure the teaching and acquisition of other languages.

a) Teaching the language of instruction

As we have mentioned above, each Autonomous Community has devised its own measures to facilitate the initial learning of the language of instruction in the host community. As a general rule, these programmes have not been integrated in the ordinary curriculum or the mainstream activities of the school where the students are going to enrol. This can be considered, therefore, a non-integrating measure for many reasons:

1. The students who “don’t know” the language are isolated in separate groups. This means that a group of students is selected (usually children of immigrants or teenagers who have recently joined the school), and marked on the basis of a transitory feature (a language can always be learnt), which is also a feature or skill they actually lack (once more, this takes us back to the deficit theory). Further aggravation is caused by the stigma that this kind of selection may cause in some age groups. What is more, this particular skill is a pre-requisite for their integration into a normalised system.
2. The teachers in these programmes, although part of the school staff, depend on the guidance department (which focuses more on psychopedagogic issues and on collaboration with the families than, for instance, on applied linguistics). This means they are not specialised in second language (L2) teaching, even though experience in this field is valued and they receive training during the academic year. Yet, the most important issue here is that tuition is not an integral part of the ordinary school curriculum, which proves, once again, the non-integrative character of these programmes.
3. The implementation of the different measures for the teaching of the language of instruction is regulated through instructions, resolutions, orders and other dispositions added to the general legal framework currently in force for the educational community (i.e. the Act on Education). Something similar happens, to a certain extent, with the Spanish Act on Immigration, elaborated separately from the basic legislative corpus on citizenship (the Spanish Constitution of 1978), which is supposed to regulate the norms of society in general, and not only those pertaining to native citizens. With such a clear antecedent, it is logical that legislation applies the same procedures in other areas, such as education.

Consequently, these programmes based on the separation of “non-proficient” or “unskilled” students regarding linguistic and communicative competence could have a negative outcome in terms of language learning. The practical results of the monolingual and segregationist policy which is currently being implemented are negative for three reasons: 1) It separates students from a natural context of Spanish-speaking students, where peer interaction takes place, thus slowing down the learning process. 2) It labels and marginalises those who cannot communicate in the language of instruction, turning this situation into an institutional problem while overrating the importance of lack of linguistic competence in a specific language. This is a problem which, in the case of children and teenagers, can be solved relatively quickly. 3) It generates competition between languages, because the contexts of use are separated and the students are pressured to substitute (and not make compatible) one language for another.⁵

The standardised norm contributes to the reinforcement of the belief that in order to be integrated one cannot be different or speak differently. The assumption that a language or an element like pronunciation may be a drawback, is made only when the language in question is not valued (i.e. if the pronunciation showed signs of an English accent, for example, perhaps such a claim would not be made). There are many indications that such a negative evaluation has an impact on students’ academic success and on their access to valuable social resources (Martín Rojo, 2009).

With regard to the teaching of the language of instruction, the truth is that it should be oriented towards teaching academic registers, both oral and spoken, so that it could really contribute to the students’ integration in the classroom. This procedure does not contradict the need for a higher degree of inclusion, recognition or appraisal of the languages and varieties spoken by students. On the contrary, it must be regarded as complementary. Numerous research projects show that a positive and open attitude in teachers towards the languages of origin improves students’ motivation and acquisition of the language of instruction. Submersion methodology for language teaching consists of teaching the second language as a single and isolated reality (“Spanish only” policy), without relying on previous knowledge of the languages of origin or resorting to a third common language to develop linguistic and communicative competence. Generally, when submersion programmes are implemented, the languages of origin are completely excluded from the classroom context (Pérez Milans, 2006). The reason is that these programmes are based on the, from our point of view, mistaken assumption, that the language of origin will be a hindrance to the learning process. However, as we pointed out above, the opposite usually happens; if we consider learning from a constructivist point of view, new concepts generally build on previous knowledge, which also includes linguistic knowledge.

b) LCO: Teaching the language and culture of origin

Another aspect of language teaching is the one relating to the learning or further training in the students’ language of origin. At present, there is no policy concerning this issue in Spain, unlike other European and North American countries. In these countries, efforts have been made to introduce measures to foster linguistic diversity associated with

⁵ For further information on the status of community languages in schools, see Mijares (2006) and MacPake et al. (2007).

additional languages,⁶ on the one hand through programmes that support community or heritage languages, and, to a lesser extent, through measures that regulate and promote coexistence rather than competition among languages (such as intercultural education and some immersion programmes that promote addition rather than substitution, or an emphasis on balancing knowledge of various languages).

Classrooms in Spain are still mainly monolingual spaces. So far there has been no attempt to remedy the clear failure to apply the European directive from 1977 that requires schools to teach the language of origin. No bilingual programmes have been set up in areas where migrant languages such as Arabic are common, even when the number of Arabic-speaking students in schools would justify such measures. In this context, nothing seems to indicate that the fifty languages (or more) which coexist in Spanish schools (Broeder and Mijares, 2004; Martín Rojo et al., 2003) will continue to stay alive.

Policies for the non-heritage languages of immigrants are one set of language teaching practices that aim to facilitate the return of “migrant workers” to their countries of origin (even if the children in question have been born in the host country). These programmes, some of which still exist today, are supported by the European Union and developed through bilateral agreements between a European State and a third country which finances them (see the European Parliament Resolution on the languages and cultures of regional and ethnic minorities in the European Community, 1987). These classes are not open to the public in general, since the main goal of the countries providing the funding is to promote and maintain the identity of origin of its citizens. Furthermore, they are organised as extracurricular activities. (Morocco and Portugal are the only countries which have taken up this initiative in Spain.)

Mijares (2006) showed that despite the new approaches to multilingualism recommended by European bodies with respect to Member States’ linguistic management (its aims, application, management or financing), the LCO (Language and Culture of Origin teaching) programmes have not been successfully implemented in Spain; they were not promoted, their content has not been reviewed and no further funding has been made available. As Mijares points out (2006: 59-65), the LCO programme is developed through bilateral agreements between European States and the non-EU countries which finance them (see the European Parliament Resolution on the languages and cultures of regional and ethnic minorities in the European Community, 1987). As we mentioned above, it was not until the late 1990s that the teaching of ‘additional languages’ started to be seen as a bridge between cultures (that is, an essential part of intercultural education within European countries) rather than as a way to keep possibilities of return open. However, this new orientation does not enjoy any financing (Bekemans and Ortiz de Urbina, 1997), nor, indeed, any official recognition from the EU (Eurydice, 2004: 71). This situation contrasts with the massive support given to the languages of other European nation states and, particularly, to English.

⁶ We use the term “additional languages” in order to show that these languages are not foreign for the people living in our country. Hence, such a designation seems preferable to more traditional ones such as “home languages”, or more recently coined ones like “community languages”. The latter term refers to all languages used in EU countries that do not possess an officially recognised status. We prefer this term to the designation “immigrant heritage language”, which often refers to a situation of multilingualism, associated with already consolidated migratory processes. Furthermore, it does not emphasise the cultural connection of the speakers with an “original” identity, country or language (like “home language”), and we consider that this connection should neither be presupposed nor imposed.

c) Teaching methodology in bilingual contexts

Nation-state ideological discourse gets constructed along with the European Union. European institutions give official recognition to the languages of each Member State that comprises the Union, and some kind of acknowledgement to the languages of minorities within these States. Part of the European project to promote multilingualism and the learning of languages (especially other European Community languages) does not take into account the languages originally brought in and still spoken by second and third generation migrants residing in the nation states of the European Union (see the European Parliament Resolution on the linguistic minorities in the European Community, 1984).

It was not until 2003 that the European Commission incorporated a more global and positive vision of linguistic diversity, by designing a plan for promoting the learning of languages that brings together all the languages spoken in the Union, whether official, regional, nation-state minority, migrant minority, or sign (McPake et al., 2007; Beacco and Byram, 2003). At present, the European Union encourages the acquisition and use of 1+2 languages (first language and two more languages); these languages may be official languages of an EU member state, languages spoken in a region of one of those states (e.g. Welsh, Catalan, Frisian), languages spoken in various parts of Europe (e.g. Romani, Yiddish), languages brought into Europe via immigration (e.g. Turkish, Arabic) or, finally, sign languages. Even though migrant languages have recently been accepted alongside European nation-state ones, as we have seen, resources have not been made available, nor any steps taken, to promote their learning and development.

d) CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning programmes

As in other regions of Spain, it should be noted that an important change has taken place in Madrid over the last five years, and that the regional government has made great efforts to overcome monolingualism in education. Nevertheless, it is not the languages of immigrants that have benefited from these changes, rather a highly valued one, from another EU country. A pilot programme for bilingual instruction, in English and Spanish, has been developed, using the approach known in Europe as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning; see Eurydice, 2006, for an overview on the implementation of this programme in the EU). This contrasts with the Content-based Programmes implemented in Canada and the USA in that the target language is not that of the community, and neither is it ubiquitously present outside the school buildings. Bilingual schools in the Madrid Region began to operate bilingual instruction in the academic year 2004/5 in Primary Education. This is a highly ambitious, inspiring project, in which many people have worked very hard and which has been generously equipped with material resources.

What is striking, in this case, is not just the financial effort made by the regional government but also the committed involvement in the programme of schools and teachers, who view the programme with enthusiasm, as a project that will modernise educational practice and methodology and modernise the country at the same time. Another remarkable aspect is that there are no doubts about taking the decision to teach English through the integrated instruction of language and course content, whereas the linguistic immersion methods aimed at the newcomers seem to be tied to old methods of teaching Spanish as a foreign language.

In general, it is considered that the Spanish–English bilingual programme raises the prestige of state schools; parents want their children to study there, and the effort made as well as the resources provided are considerable. All of this highlights the unequal value awarded to this language in comparison with those spoken by the immigrant population. Although it is true that English, like German and French, is a language of EU Member States, and that it does not contradict the “one state–one language” model, it is still surprising that such emphasis is placed on this programme rather than on integrating the languages spoken by a large proportion of migrant students. It is also striking that there is no arguing about why English becomes a language of instruction, while it is frequently disputed that the official languages of the regions of Spain should be the languages of instruction in those communities.

Current and Future Challenges

In the previous sections, two processes tracing the construction of inequality in multilingual and multicultural classrooms have been discussed. The first one relates to the construction of the “other” as deficient or, at least, as a non-legitimate participant in the class. The second process is the imbalanced social value given to linguistic varieties spoken by students in multilingual and multicultural schools. This is explained by the uneven status of individuals and groups, and which, in turn, has a profound impact on the image of those who are “different” or viewed as not-competent, or which predicts their potential success or failure. In this case, the “Spanish only” norm shows the extent to which the national language is salient as a form of constructing social difference and social inequality in this region — as it happens, in fact, in many countries.

The unequal assessment of students’ resources and personal capital is linked to the role of schools’ linguistic practices in constraining social mobility - a topic traditionally addressed in critical pedagogy and sociolinguistics (see Labov, 1972; Ogbu, 1992 & 1993; Willis, 1977, among others). Teachers’ expectations play a key role in this process because of their possible “Pygmalion” effect, that is, students will end up seeing themselves as the others say they are or expect them to be (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992), in this case, “deficient” or less competent.

The persistence of a monolingual sociolinguistic order and the imposition of a monolingual norm, perpetuate the hegemony of Castilian Standard. As well as this, the opportunities to develop teaching practices adequate for students’ needs are lost. This sociolinguistic order, therefore, not only contributes to these students being perceived as less competent, but also acts as a barrier to their social and educational integration, which may even lead to social closure. This concept makes reference to a situation in which access to certain social spheres, such as school, is hampered by the exclusive control of a given sector of the population over certain resources, in this case linguistic ones, where access to these resources is limited (Sarangi & Roberts 1999). Our analysis shows how language and forms of classroom communication can hinder students’ integration. These students not only have to overcome the difficulties involved in learning a new language and adapting to a different school environment, but because of these barriers, they also have to conform to requirements in the classroom, avoid useful resources that the teachers do not value (most often because they do not know them), and overcome a social image that presents them as deficient.

Several contradictions and tensions can be observed. The first contradiction is that languages which are negatively valued, such as migrant languages, become a resource to gain capital, and to increase learning and performance in the language of instruction, i.e. standard Spanish. Students' responses to the monolingual norm challenge the sociolinguistic order of the school and the distribution of symbolic capital. However, these response practices are also constrained.

The review we have presented shows that linguistic education in the Spanish system (whether the teaching of the language of instruction or the languages of origin) is mainly geared towards students from an immigrant background, and not to the student community as a whole. This also happens within the English-Spanish bilingual programmes currently underway, where it is the parents' decision to enrol their children in them and the teachers' suggestions to finally do it or not, that makes it available for some but not for every student. As a result, these programmes cause separation and make relational and communicative exchange more difficult. Consequently, both the principle of interculturality and the vision of integration as one of mutual adaptation, are compromised. Moreover, when there is no support for their languages of origin, students with an immigrant background are assimilated, i.e. taught in the language, norms, knowledge and values of the majority culture. The incorporation of their possible contributions to the host population are not encouraged but lost (Martín Rojo et al., 2003; Alcalá, 2003 & 2006; Mijares, 2006; Pérez Milans, 2006).

While languages from EU nation states such as English or French are highly valued and introduced into the curricula, resources are not provided, nor steps taken to promote the learning and development of 'migrant languages'. A migration flux in Europe is challenging the monolingual model of 'one state – one language', and in this context some languages are seen as a resource while others are seen as a threat (see Extra and Verhoeven, 1993).

The appearance of a double discourse in policies and in their implementations allows the coexistence (although not without striking contradictions) between linguistic and cultural ideologies of integration – judged by their statements of intention and principles – and assimilationist, marginalising programmes (Martín Rojo, 2009). These kinds of contradictions are also to be found in other parts of the European Union. It was not until the late 1990s that an intercultural model for education was proposed, one recognising that in order to ensure mutual integration, it is necessary to fight racism and xenophobia in the population as a whole, changing programmes and training teaching staff (financing projects for the design of activities and teaching materials to follow this model is carried out through the Comenius Programme; see Eurydice, 2004). Nevertheless, the European Union itself recognises that intercultural education is not widespread throughout the EU (Eurydice, 2004: 71). Indeed, in the relevant EU documents, the differential objectives of this model of education are not defined clearly, while the teaching of the language of instruction continues to be seen as an essential element in integration measures.

As a consequence, although our research results show that schools have made some changes to adapt to the new social and economic context, they also prove that it is usually the students themselves who have to adapt to the school (for a more in-depth analysis of this subject, see Martín Rojo, 2009). The task is particularly difficult for teenagers whose

parents are immigrants or for those who even come alone (unaccompanied minors) and who must not only learn the local language late in their instruction process, but also the cultural norms of functioning in society, school regulations, new subjects' contents, new communication patterns, etc. A similar problem is faced by teachers who must design programmes, methods and materials, without having received prior, solid and effective training for this activity.

Finally, with respect to the language education programmes analysed in this paper, it is important to highlight the hierarchy of languages resulting from the valuation of their use and application. English appears as a language not only integrated into the curriculum in a marginal way, but as a language of instruction inside the classroom, equivalent to Spanish. However, the primacy of Spanish is unquestionable in monolingual contexts (except for those Communities with a co-official language, where monolingualism still exists, but only in one of the two languages spoken in the region and depending on the linguistic policy implemented in that area), since its use is extensive and almost compulsory both in the academic sphere and in leisure spaces. The rest of the languages and varieties which make up the linguistic capital of students with a migrant background are valued unevenly. Some of the standard varieties of those migrant languages (such as Arabic and Portuguese) are promoted in out-of-school contexts, within the framework of the LCO programme, as long as there is a demand from those concerned. Nevertheless, customary use of these languages of origin is restricted to the family sphere. They are usually excluded from the school and the classroom (their use is even forbidden there) and regarded as an exotic or 'multicultural' element, even if they certainly constitute an individual asset for the person who has that 'advantage'. However, they are neither used as a tool in the teaching-learning process of the language of instruction, nor considered an asset for the whole of the school population. The hierarchy is clearly in favour of languages with 'international prestige', or related to a colonial past.

Considering this state of affairs, some contributions could be made to improve the adaptation process of the education system to cultural diversity and multilingualism, through actions like the following:

- Programmes for teaching the language of instruction must employ immersion and not submersion methodologies. In other words, they must rely on the resources and linguistic-communicative competences which students already possess in their own languages, or use a third language as a tool for mutual understanding and linguistic support between students and teachers. Furthermore, these programmes must encourage the hiring of bilingual teachers or those with other nationalities who are able to communicate in two or more languages and are familiar with varied sociocultural contexts.
- Schools must be completely involved in programmes such as the initial language immersion programmes for newcomers. This would prevent the isolation and segregation typical of these classrooms and of the students who attend them. In order to make it possible, it is necessary to raise awareness within the school community, highlighting the value of diversity and neutralising teachers' low expectations towards these pupils.
- In order for language programmes to form a real bridge between link classrooms and mainstream classrooms, it is essential for them to include the teaching of academic

contents and register, as well as school and classroom routines. Thus, various changes have to take place simultaneously: a necessary and continuous teacher training, the incorporation of new teaching methods into language teaching and standard academic Spanish language teaching, and the supervision and monitoring of the implementation of these programmes and language teaching methods by linguists (and not only by counsellors, who are usually psychopedagogists).

- Finally, it is of outmost importance that students' language and academic knowledge be assessed adequately, beyond their being able to demonstrate this knowledge or reproduce it in the language of instruction. Therefore, there is a need for new proposals within the academic context to reinforce and to improve the knowledge of migrant languages, as well as for the development of a positive appraisal and attitude towards multilingualism and towards every language and variety coexisting in Spanish schools.

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Language education and training in Flanders (Belgium)

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Language education and training in Flanders (Belgium)

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Abstract

Currently schools in Flanders deal with various challenges resulting from the multicultural reality in which we live. In a globalising world an active language policy is important, especially in educational matters. The Flemish language policy tries to offer an answer to this challenge.

The first part of this contribution focuses on the complex situation of the Belgian country with three national languages spoken by three different communities. In the following section the organisation of education in Flanders is explained. Before raising the question how the Flemish language policy will evolve in future, the central argument of the article - about the language policy of the Flemish government - is formulated in part three. In this policy attention is given to language as a tool for social cohesion, learning Dutch as an important element of Flemish identity and last but not least the choice for foreign languages.

More concretely the Flemish language policy focuses on the engagement of every school to develop its own language policy, which the inspectorate takes up as a special point of interest. The Government provides the framework but the schools make the painting.

Naturally this language policy appeals to the responsibility and work of curriculum-builders who found their curriculum-reform and -development on research and results of evaluation. Sample surveys, international comparative research and language tests provide the necessary information. The Flemish language education is especially focused on language fluency but it also integrates structural language aspects. The equilibrium between these two aspects of language learning is fundamental. Educational goals must therefore be adapted to this equilibrium for Dutch as well as for foreign languages. In short: the language policy is an 'and- and' story.

Attention has to be paid to both Dutch as schoolroom language and foreign language teaching and learning. Next to this "every" teacher is considered to be a language teacher. In the Flemish foreign language policy much attention is paid to the early acquisition of foreign languages. From kindergarten onwards children are made sensitive for languages and they are initiated in French preceding the formal French language education. The transition from primary to secondary education is made more fluent and transparent and projects on Content and Language Integrated Learning are developed. The government also encourages schools to test language use, especially at the beginning of primary education (6 year-olds) so that schools know how to start and continue their language policy. At the end of compulsory education every pupil must speak his or her mother tongue and at least two foreign languages. The attainment levels of linguistic fluency of foreign languages are generated by linking the EFRL with the educational goals ratified by the Flemish parliament. To encourage schools to develop their local language policy and to motivate all Flemish teachers to become language teachers, the government has created an informative and communicative platform.

Theoretical statements about the importance of foreign language skills are not enough to make pupils and students learn languages. Therefore the intercultural approach of language teaching combined with the professional use of concepts such as mobility of pupils and teachers might stimulate positive language attitudes among pupils. Last but not least the question is raised: what about Flemish language policy in the future?

Introduction

A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his territory (Morris (ed.), 1994, p. 58).

In a multicultural society many problems and challenges, such as racism, intolerance, social exclusion or sustainable development have to do with language. That's why an active language policy is important, especially in educational matters. The Flemish language policy tries to offer an answer to the various challenges resulting from the multicultural character of both society and schools.

The first part of this article focuses on the complex situation of the Belgian country with three national languages spoken by three different communities. In the following section the organisation of education in Flanders is explained. Subject of part three is the central argument of the article and is about the language policy of the Flemish government. Finally the question is raised how the Flemish language policy will evolve in future?

Flanders in Multilingual Belgium

Flanders is situated in the northern part of Belgium and counts a population of about six million. The official language is Dutch. Flanders includes both the Flemish Community and the Flemish region. The Flemish Region covers the Dutch language area with the provinces of West and East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg and Flemish Brabant. The Flemish Community comprises both the population of the Dutch-language area as well as the Dutch speakers in Brussels.

As a consequence of the option for merging the parliament and the government of both the Flemish Region and the Flemish Community into a single Flemish Parliament and a single Flemish Government, one and the same authority exercises both regional and community authority. In this way political decision-making is simplified.

In addition to Flanders federal Belgium comprises two other communities. The Walloon Region, which is spread over the French and German-language areas, with the provinces of Walloon Brabant, Hainaut, Liège, Namur and Luxemburg. The bilingual area of Brussels Capital where the two languages must be treated equally is covered by the Brussels capital region.

The French Community comprises the inhabitants of the French-language area and the French speaking inhabitants of the Brussels Capital Region. The population of the German-language area – approximately 70,000 people – is included in the German speaking community. In short, institutions on the French-language side are structured differently from those on the Flemish side. That's why the Belgian federal state is characterised as an asymmetrical federal model.

Formal Education in Flanders¹

Although the federal Belgian authorities are competent for a few educational issues - start

¹ More detailed information is available on the Eurydice website: <http://www.eurydice.org>

and end of compulsory education, establishing the minimum conditions for obtaining a diploma, determining education staff pensions - the powers for education lie with the communities. The Minister of education, who is a member of the Flemish Government, is responsible for almost all aspects of education policy, from nursery to university education. Naturally he is also accountable for language policy in education.

Compulsory education was introduced in Belgium in order to guarantee every child's right to education. Compulsory education starts on 1 September of the year in which a child reaches the age 6 and it lasts for 12 years. As well as the right to education, the freedom of education is a constitutional right in Belgium.

Every natural or legal person has the right to organise education and establish institutions for this purpose. The 'governing body' (or school board) is a key concept in Flemish education. The governing body is responsible for one or more schools and is comparable to a board of directors in a company. Governing bodies enjoy considerable autonomy. They are entirely free in choosing teaching methods and are allowed to base their education on a certain philosophy or educational view. They can also determine their own curriculum and timetables as well as appoint their own staff. However schools that want government recognition or funding must meet the attainment targets (Information and Communication Division – Agency for Educational Communication, 2008).

These attainment targets refer to the compulsory core curriculum laid down by the Flemish parliament. Moreover there are educational networks in Flanders associating governing bodies.

There are three educational networks: GO ! Education of the Flemish Community is publicly run education organised by the public body called 'het GO !! Onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap' acting under the authority of the Flemish Community... Publicly funded, publicly run education (OGO) comprises municipal education (organised by local authorities) as well as provincial education (organised by provincial authorities)... The publicly funded, privately run schools (VGO) deliver education organised by a private person or private organisation... Privately run education mainly consists of catholic schools (Information and Communication Division – Agency for Educational Communication, 2008, p. 13).

As these networks make curricula and timetables for the schools they represent, their role in making and implementing language policy may not be underestimated.

Flemish Language Policy

Following the European language policy – communication in foreign languages is one of the key competences, each European citizen has to gain practical skills in at least two foreign languages, multilingualism has to be achieved in order to use different languages as well as to promote the coexistence of different language communities in the same geographical region² – the Flemish. Flemish language policy has become an 'and-and' story.

Both a good mastery of Dutch as well as the learning of foreign languages is subject of the

² Cfr Europese Raad van Barcelona, 15 en 16 maart 2002, Conclusies van het voorzitterschap, deel I, 43.1. COM(2003) 449: Het leren van talen en de taalverscheidenheid bevorderen: actieplan 2004 - 2006; COM(1995) 590: Witboek Onderwijzen en leren

policy. As language is a tool for social cohesion a mastery of the mother tongue is a priority. Moreover, the Dutch language is an important element of Flemish identity and promotes more equity among pupils as understanding the schoolroom language creates equal chances. Newcomers are expected to learn Dutch in order to benefit mutual understanding and social cohesion.

In the same way the Flemish language education is focused on language fluency but at the same time it integrates structural language aspects and aims at intercultural competencies. As human beings walk on two legs this equilibrium between these two aspects of language learning - communicative fluency and structural language aspects - is fundamental. Educational goals in the curriculum are therefore adapted to this equilibrium for Dutch as well as for foreign languages.

Targets and Languages in the Curriculum

Flanders introduced a national core curriculum in primary education (1998) and in the first stage of secondary education (1997). The core curriculum for the second and third stage in secondary education followed gradually (from 2001 onwards). This national core curriculum consists of attainment targets and developmental targets, and is endorsed by the Flemish Parliament. The core curriculum subscribes minimum targets of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are to be met by the end of the applicable education level. The Flemish government considers these targets crucial to secure that young people gain the necessary competences to enter the labour market well prepared or to start successfully in further education. It is the core task of every school to meet these targets. Because these minimum targets add up to the core curriculum, they are important quality standards.

What about languages in the curriculum?

In primary school, next to the mother tongue Dutch, the French language is a compulsory subject in at least the 5th and 6th form in primary education.

In secondary school French, English as well as German are part of the learning targets, however there are some differences between General Secondary Schools, Technical and Vocational Secondary Schools. These differences can be summarised as follows: In General Secondary Schools, Dutch, French and English are part of the basic curriculum as is German for some options. In technical- and art- secondary schools, Dutch, French and English are part of the core curriculum. In vocational secondary schools, Dutch, French or English (the school can choose between these two foreign languages) are part of the core curriculum.

This summary makes clear that two of the most widely spoken languages, namely French and English, are learned in secondary school so that students starting in higher education are able to communicate in several ways in both languages. On the other hand there is some difference in the level of knowledge and skills for these languages between general, technical secondary and vocational schools.

Final targets for the learning of foreign languages in the core curriculum were developed

and approved by the Flemish parliament. These approved targets were linked with the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF).

Table 1 Targets for learning foreign languages

	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Oral interaction	Writing	Global
Primary education	A 1	A 1	A 1	A 1	A 1	A 1
1 A First cycle	A 1/A 2	A 1/ A 2	A 2	A 2	A 1/A 2	A 2
1 B First cycle	A 1	A 1	A 1	A 1	A 1	A 1
2 aso General second cycle	A 2/B 1	A 2/B 1	B 1	B 1	B 1	B 1
2 bso Vocational second cycle	A 1	A 1	Geen ET	A 1	A 1	A 1
2 kso/tso Technical/arts second cycle	A 2	A 2	A 2	A 2	A 2	A 2
3 aso Third cycle	B 1	B 1	B 1	B 1	B 1	B 1
3 bso (1+2) Third cycle	A 1/A2	A 1/A2	A 1	A1/A 2	A 1	A 1
3 bso (3) Third cycle	A 2	A1/A 2	A 1	A 2	A 1	A 2
3 kso/tso Third cycle	A 2/B 1	A 2/B 1	A 2/B 1	A 2/B 1	A 2	A 2/B 1

This linking process has been scientifically validated by the Catholic University of Leuven. These levels are the minimum-levels that have to be reached. Naturally, the governing bodies of the schools, the educational networks, the editors of textbooks and the autonomous schools can opt to pursue higher levels.

Intercultural Competencies

One of the elements that has been integrated in the recently revised core curriculum for languages has to do with intercultural competences, ‘intercultural learning’. In a globalising world and multicultural society the question is raised how to act in front of the other, the stranger...another CULTURE. As the colour of society changes, the school-population also changes as a consequence of globalisation and migration. A diversity of worldviews, habits and opinions penetrates our society. And a diversity of reactions is announced as methods to cope with this plurality: from conservatism to liberalism and relativism to fundamentalism. Likewise, our education is challenged and cannot avoid the questions that are related to this. Our way of dealing with people who have a cultural background that is different from ours may lead either to a dialogue or to rather defensive reactions. Defensive reactions boil down to refusing

to enter into a dialogue because one refuses to have the evidence of one's own identity put into question by 'the other' or by the stranger in oneself. Assimilation, but also segregation, are defensive strategies in the context of the multicultural reality. To start a dialogue does not only require a certain willingness to transform one's own world, to put one's relationship with other people and with oneself into question, as well as one's traditions, but it also presupposes that one clarifies what is tolerable in terms of deviant customs, values, norms, and practices. For the Flemish community a dialogue with other cultures - interculturality - is certainly the option.

Yet, at a deeper level one has to ask what the word 'culture' means in the perspective of education and language learning. The idea of 'culture' is a powerful stimulant for educational thinking in general and many writers, philosophers and sociologists have recognised this. As a consequence of this, the nuances and 'levels' of culture developed as educational images have been, and still are, many. Even more, its richness and power could bring about its own demise through over-use and over-stretching. Is culture about a people? Is it about a heritage? Is it about a set of values? Is it about language? Does it concern the family, the village, the clan, the tribe or the country? The question can be asked whether culture is about the classroom, the school or the educational system?

More than ever, there is an urgent need for intercultural dialogue. For this reason, it makes sense to educate children in this dialogue from an early age. The education system must play a leading role in promoting this vital aim. But where will the teachers find their inspiration?

Quoting the former Flemish minister of education: *Globalisation is making the world increasingly smaller.*

Our society is changing rapidly. Familiar concepts are being questioned, which leads to uncertainty... In order to be able to make choices and take decisions, children and youth need a framework of reference, an identity... cultural education can play a crucial role here. After all, where can one learn more about human identity, than through the arts and culture of the ages of human civilisation before us...

(Vandenbroucke, 2009).

Dutch as Second Language Acquisition

A formal educational provision of Dutch as a second language (DSL) exists in Flanders since 1970. Yet, until the mid-nineties this was mostly limited to non-formal socio-cultural education. Almost no attention was paid to quality management, common orientation, and the professionalism of teachers. The training objectives were often not clearly defined. No method of evaluation or certification existed and the different courses were not recognised by the different providers. Differentiation between the level of education and the prior knowledge of non-Dutch speakers had not been made. Both university-educated non-Dutch speakers with high cognitive skills as well as course participants who had never or hardly ever been to school were following the same courses. The negative consequences of this policy were evident: the lowest educated did not get any opportunity to learn Dutch, as a result of which their chances in society were dramatically reduced. In 1993, the Flemish authorities together with all key stakeholders organised a first round table conference on Dutch as a second language.

On the basis of the policy recommendations resulting from this round table conference

the provision of Dutch as a second language was uniformed during the following years. An important step was the adaptation by all public provision providers of The Common European Framework of Reference. This framework enabled the institutions to recognise each others courses and certificates, which strongly improved chances for non-Dutch speakers. Next to this another important development was the increased attention devoted to the prior knowledge and learning skills of non-Dutch speaking course participants. In order to orient course participants to a suitable provision a model of entrance examination was developed for the first time in 1997.

Among the formal providers of basic courses of Dutch as a second language two poles had been developing. The Centres for Adult Education which catered for higher educated course participations with better learning skills on the one hand and the Centres for Basic Education which were oriented towards the lowest educated non-Dutch speakers on the other. A negative result of the mutual competition between these institutions was that a lot of course participants still ended up in a provision which was unsuitable for them. The majority of these course participants got discouraged and dropped out. In 2002 a second round table conference took place and one of the important results of this conference was the establishment of eight Dutch Language Houses with the aim of referring non-Dutch speakers in a neutral and objective manner to the most suitable provision. To this end a cognitive skills test, giving an indication of course participants learning potential, was developed.

Today lower educated and illiterate non-Dutch speakers are offered a suitable provision of Dutch as a second language in the Dutch Language Houses. Last but not least, a strong emphasis was placed on the professionalism of the training provision of Dutch as a second language. Stimulated by the Support Centre for Dutch as a second language, now renamed Centre for Language and Education, test databases and model material were developed, an in-service training policy for teachers was elaborated and improved quality was worked on across institutional boundaries. In this way a growing number of non-Dutch speakers became encouraged to opt for a formal training in Dutch as a second language and to make less use of voluntary initiatives.

All these policy measures go hand in hand with a reinforced activation policy for non-Dutch speakers. In 2003, the Flemish citizen integration policy was adopted. Among other measures Dutch language knowledge has been set as a prerequisite for successful integration. Anyone who wants to be part of social life, who seeks to participate in society, who wishes to help his/her children at school or is looking for a job can only do so if he/she can communicate in Dutch. In this perspective, newcomers are obliged to attend a reception programme, including a basic course of Dutch as a second language. Meanwhile the activation policy has extended to employment and housing policies. For instance, if a person can't communicate in Dutch and wishes to retain his right to unemployment benefit he or she is obligated to follow a course of Dutch as a second language. People who wish to apply for rented social housing must show at least the willingness to learn Dutch. All these measures resulted between 2002 and 2008 in a rise of the participation in courses of Dutch as a second language by 38% at the Centres for Basic Education and by 32% at the Centres for Adult Education. A challenge for the near future is that the obligation of non-Dutch speakers to learn Dutch also entails an obligation for the Flemish authorities, which have to make a sufficient provision of Dutch language courses available in order to meet the needs.

Early Foreign Language Acquisition

In order to prepare children to become citizens of a plurilingual and multicultural world, the Flemish language policy argues for early foreign language acquisition. Through starting playing games and singing songs in Kindergarten, pupils are made sensitive to languages. Following this process of being made sensitive to languages, pupils are initiated in French (priority) English and other foreign languages. This non-formal initiation, without the stress of evaluation, precedes the formal language education in French.

During the development of the final targets for foreign languages, attention has been given to both the ongoing lines (of educational goals) between primary and secondary education as well as to the coordination between the learning of Dutch and foreign languages.

Evaluation³

First of all, schools are encouraged to use language tests so that they know how to start and to continue with their language policy. The Flemish inspectorate carries out audits based on the CIPO - context, input, process, and output - model. Since January 2009, full school inspection has been replaced by a system of risk based inspection. School audits provide primarily information at school level, whereas the Flemish national assessments focus on the system level. During an audit the inspectorate gathers information based on interviews, observations and document analysis. However, they do not administer tests to students. The inspectorate develops special tools for observing and evaluating language policy in schools.

Next to this the Flemish government tries to find a balance between external and internal evaluation within its education system. Since the new decree of September 2009, schools are responsible for their own quality assurance. It is mandatory for schools to implement a system of quality assurance, but they are free to choose their own system. Flemish schools have always had a great deal of autonomy. They are responsible for the evaluation of their students and it is a long and standing tradition that teachers make their own tests to decide whether a student will or will not pass. As a consequence there are no reliable data available at system level on pupils' attainment. This situation is fairly unusual in Europe, where in many countries students will be subject to some form of external evaluation at, at least, one point in their educational career.

The Flemish government decided resolutely against collecting output information at system level with central examinations and has opted for a national assessment programme: a system of surveys in a representative sample of schools. Surveys are administered in primary and secondary education: these will test the attainment of targets from the national core curriculum for the given educational level. No student, teacher nor school will be sanctioned in any way on account of their test results in the national assessment. Only the research team has access to the identity of students and schools, and it is their task to provide feedback at school level. All the results are published without revealing schools' or students' identities,

³ For more information see [www.http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/DVO/](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/DVO/)

so students and schools participate anonymously.

The National Assessment Programme is complementary to international comparative studies and the school audits by the Flemish inspectorate. Flanders takes part in international comparative studies like PISA and ICCS. These international studies and the Flemish national assessment programme highlight a different aspect of educational quality. International studies provide information about the position of the Flemish education system compared to other education systems for certain skills, domains. However, these international studies do not focus on the Flemish curriculum, whereas the national assessment programme only focuses on the Flemish attainment targets. Comparative research has e.g. revealed that there is only a very limited overlap between our attainment targets and the focus of TIMSS and PISA. To illustrate the usefulness of this comparative research: The PISA study 'Where immigrant students succeed?' revealed that immigrant students in Flanders are likely to attend schools with less favourable characteristics. Recent findings from OECD illustrate that one of the most important causes for failure in school of non-native speakers is the fact that Dutch isn't spoken at home. In line with these findings, the national assessment programmes revealed that students who speak Dutch at home perform significantly better than students who don't.

Although a rich variety of targets in various curriculum areas are tested in the National Assessment Programme, surveys are not designed to measure all learning outcomes (e.g. some skills and attitudes are hard to measure in large scale surveys). Therefore it is important that the inspectorate keeps on evaluating whether schools accomplish their 'duties' and work on the realisation of all attainment targets, also of the ones that are not measurable, or are less measurable with a large scale survey.

A survey of the national assessment programme is a test administered to a representative sample of schools and students. The tests are designed, administered and marked by a research team of the University of Leuven on behalf of (and funded by) the Flemish government. Teachers invigilate the exam, while an external invigilator supervises the exam, following a detailed set of instructions from the research team. Every test focuses on a different aspect of the national curriculum. It tests the extent to which the targets have been mastered by the sample population. The tests can only be administered at the end of the educational level. The reason for this is clear: minimal targets need to be mastered by that time. In general, the surveys are written paper and pencil tests. In some surveys a smaller sample of students will sit practical tests (e.g. an oral interview, a microscopy test) as well as the written tests.

In order to monitor changes and trends, sample surveys are repeated after some years. In doing so, the results can be compared to those of prior tests. Patterns which emerge after a third administration can lead to empirical information about increase and decrease in quality. Also, if tests are repeated, people may be more inclined to take measures to improve disappointing results. However, the national assessment tests are not designed to measure learning gains of individual students. Measurement of learning gains requires a longitudinal study.

To quote the former minister of education:

"So how to go about 'strengthening language support measures in school'? 'Mastery of Dutch, our language of instruction, is an essential condition to learn in school, so we need to know where we are at the beginning

of a learning stage... These tests should provide schools with valuable information about the language ability of incoming students, so that each school can develop an appropriate language policy. Besides, teachers can identify the problems the children have and find a suitable programme for each of them so that they take the highest benefit from the support we can offer..."⁴

Other Actions⁵

In order to implement the Flemish language policy a large autonomy is given to schools. The government provides the framework and schools make the painting. Apart from the early foreign language acquisition and the minimum final goals, the government - presuming that every school works at its own language policy and dares to leave too traditional paths - makes tool available for the schools. Among other valuable elements of the framework offered by the government, are the following:

Focusing on mastering Dutch as schoolroom language, in order to avoid duality and to counter the lack of language fluency that can cause high grade repetition. In teacher training special efforts are asked in this perspective as every teacher is a language teacher. Moreover the inspectorate takes language as a special point of interest.

From September 2007 nine secondary schools are involved in a Context and Language Integrated Learning programme. Opposite to the French-speaking part of Belgium the Flemish government hasn't chosen for immersion but for teaching some subjects like maths, sciences, Latin, business economics, social skills, playing chess...in French or English. One of the important aspects in CLIL practice refers to interdisciplinary work and Team Teaching, which is also characterised as co-teaching and collaborative teaching. Extra courses in Dutch are organised for foreign language newcomers in primary and secondary Education. Basic competences for teachers were renewed and the foreign language level for professional bachelors primary education was raised.

In cooperation with other communities the Flemish government promotes and enables pupils' exchanges, a language bath for teachers in Wallonia or France, exchanges of teachers between Dutch and French speaking schools in Brussels.

Continuous teacher training is organised, concerning themes as schoolroom language, early foreign language acquisition.

A Language Learning Website

An informative and communicative platform has been created in order to stimulate schools to develop their local language policy. This website gives information about the most recent news concerning language education, interesting language activities and useful software.

⁴ Quality assurance in current educational policy Toespraak van de Vlaamse minister van Werk, Onderwijs en Vorming Frank Vandenbroucke 16 november 2006

⁵ For more information see [www:http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/DVO/](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/DVO/)

Other material such as articles and good practices can be found on this website.⁶ Teachers themselves can contribute on this site by sending teaching materials, examples of practices concerning specific language issues. This forum will certainly stimulate interaction, innovation and cooperation on multiple levels of the Flemish foreign language policy and education.

Future

Since September of this year, a new government has started its five years legislature. The renewed and revised final targets for Dutch and foreign languages will be implemented and evaluated.

A lot of actions that have started the last five years will be continued and intensified. Certainly a renewed action concerning the language portfolio will be put on the agenda, mastering Dutch as schoolroom language will be of prior importance in the language policy of every school, possibilities of cooperation between formal, informal and non-formal language learning will be investigated, intercultural learning will be elaborated...

New policy elements will be announced during the coming months: growing up in an information society, students of today have their own way of processing information. To link language learning, intercultural competences and multimedia literacy is an important challenge for both policy makers as well as all the stakeholders in Flemish education.

The process of reforming secondary education has been started recently. How to situate language learning in this reform?

Let us conclude with asserting that since we are human beings, we stay open to the last word as something not yet spoken.

*Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world,
the ultimate word of the world and about the world
has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free,
everything is still in the future and will always be in the future.*
(Bakhtin, 1984, p.166).

⁶ www.delathoogvoortalen.be

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Introduction of standardised language assessment into Croatian secondary education

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—Martina Prpic

Abstract

National standardised assessment was introduced into the Croatian educational system in 2006. Until then, there was no assessment system that tested the attainment of educational standards in Croatian secondary schools. The exam specifications were based on the principles of outcomes-based education, but they also had to be written within the limits of the existing curricula. This was a challenge for the test developers because the curricula were outdated and pending change. In the area of modern foreign languages this meant that the specifications had to reconcile the curriculum written in 1994 and Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Hence, the test developers not only tested the attainment of educational standards, but also set them in relation to the CEFR. Since the process of relating examinations to the CEFR is still in development in Europe, the test developers didn't have direct instructions how to conduct the procedure. Future challenges involve further development of the exams, especially in relation to the CEFR, and working on them, as well as coordinating with the new curriculum.

Standardised national assessment in Croatian secondary education

Standardised national assessment was introduced into Croatian secondary schools in 2006. There were many envisioned benefits of introducing systematic standardised assessment of student achievement into Croatian schools. The main benefit of such a change was the improvement of the quality of the educational system. Namely, external standardised testing would provide a more valid, reliable and objective assessment of student achievement in secondary schools and give vital information not only to students, but also to the teachers, the schools and other stakeholders on what the students really know and can do. This would provide a sound basis for the analysis of the causes of success and failure in education and the actions the stakeholders must take in order to improve the parts of the system that need change.

A centralised system of assessment would also promote discussion about and help set clear national standards for assessing student academic performance at different stages of the educational process and provide clear guidance for the long overdue curriculum reform in Croatian schools. Namely, the test developers were given an opportunity to influence what is being taught in schools, because how something is being tested has a great impact on how something is taught and learnt in school. In that way, the test developers were able to introduce changes into the educational system without having to wait for the official change of the existing curricula. Of course, they still did not have complete freedom to introduce any change they thought necessary, but they had to work within the limits of the official curriculum.

Also, standardised assessment at the end of secondary school would provide a more sound basis for the certification of secondary education (both at the end of vocational and general secondary education) and a more transparent and valid selection of candidates for enrolment into university. However, for now, the new secondary school leaving exam would be used only for the certification of general secondary education, but those students who attended vocational schools and wish to continue studying at university were free to take the exam as well.

Outcomes-based approach

One of the improvements that the new system of examinations introduced into the Croatian educational system is the application of the outcomes-based approach in education. Instead of focusing on the subject matter that the students are to be taught in schools (which is the case in the majority of the official curricula), the focus was shifted onto the student and what he or she can actually do at the end of the school year or secondary education.

‘Clear standards of knowledge and competences expected from the students are set. Learning is focused on the targeted learning results and the teachers are given clear guidelines on how to give support to students in the process of acquiring knowledge and developing competences’ (Vijeće Ministarstva znanosti, obrazovanja i športa za uvođenje državne mature u hrvatsko školstvo, 2005)

This approach has presented the experts involved in the creation of examination specifications and examinations both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge because they are expected to determine what needs to be tested and present it in terms of competences, while conforming with the boundaries set by the existing curricula which do not have learning outcomes stated in such a way. However, it is also an opportunity to prepare ground for the curriculum reform by setting tentative standards and testing them on the student population which is expected to satisfy them.

The characteristics of the examinations

The standardised tests introduced into the schools were both low stakes and high stakes. The low-stakes examinations were administered in the first, second and third grades of secondary schools and they were used to prepare all the stakeholders for the high-stakes secondary school leaving examination which is to be used as a certificate for secondary education (in grammar schools) and also as an entrance examination to the universities. These low-stakes examinations have prepared the stakeholders in various ways; the National Centre for External Evaluation of Education, the body in charge of administering the examinations, has been given an opportunity to prepare and test out the procedures and the infrastructure needed for administering large-scale examinations, the teachers and the students were given a gradual introduction into what the students need to know and be able to do at different stages of the educational process, the test developers were given an opportunity to practise their test making skills and test out the outcomes they set for the examinations on the population that is expected to satisfy them without any serious

consequences for the students, etc. However, since the entire project of introducing standardised achievement only started in 2006, the high-stakes secondary-school leaving examination has not yet been administered in schools, even though the examination materials have been prepared. The plan is to administer the exam for the first time in the next school year (2009/2010).

The subjects tested in the examinations

In the first national exams in 2006, the students were tested in the knowledge of the Croatian language and literature, the first modern foreign language taught in schools (English, German or French) and mathematics. The examinations were administered on the entire population of first-grade students in general secondary schools (grammar schools) and thus provided a lot of material for the comparison and analysis of the state of learning and teaching in the schools whose students were tested. In 2007, the number of school subjects tested increased and also included Latin, Greek, physics, biology, chemistry and ICT, which were tested on a sample of second-grade students in grammar schools. In 2008, all students were tested in Croatian, mathematics and a modern foreign language as well as one elective subject (Latin, biology, physics, ICT, chemistry, geography, history, ethics, logic, psychology, sociology, religion, music and art). This closely resembled the situation that the students were going to encounter on the secondary school leaving exam, where they would have three compulsory subjects (Croatian, mathematics and a modern foreign language) and an optional number of elective subjects, depending on their preferences and what they were going to need for entrance into the faculty of their choice.

The examinations in compulsory subjects can be taken at two different levels; the basic level and the higher level. What is being tested on the basic level corresponds to what is taught of the subject in those types of secondary schools that have the least number of classes of the subject and the higher level corresponds to what the students are taught in grammar schools. Determining what was to be tested on the basic and higher level respectively was a challenge because the existing documents prescribing what is to be taught are outdated and need change (curriculum reform). This was especially problematic for the experts involved in writing examination specifications and examinations in modern foreign languages.

The issues in writing specifications for modern foreign language examinations

Writing examination specifications for modern foreign languages has been a process that somewhat differs from writing specifications for other subjects due to the existence of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This is because the CEFR has set up an internationally recognised system of six levels of language competence and has actually provided the test developers with a set of recognised external standards of language competence. However, even though having a more or less defined system of standards to conform to has made the task easier for the modern foreign language test developers, it may have also created new problems to deal with. First of all, creating tests out of the materials provided by the CEFR is no easy task. The CEFR provides general

descriptions of competences that the student is supposed to have at a certain level in a certain language skill, and they are so general that they don't give clear guidance on how to test them. For example:

Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated. (Council of Europe, 2001, page 66)

However, this problem has not been encountered by only Croatian language experts creating modern foreign language tests. The challenge of tackling the problem of referring examinations to the CEFR has had to be taken on by all the language test makers who want to create exams at a certain CEFR level. The most notable example, and the most important for Croatian test developers, has been the project led by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe in which several experts from several different countries have been working on coordinating exams with the CEFR and creating a document which will help other test makers to define their exams in terms of the levels of the CEFR. This document, the Manual for relating language examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (the Manual), in its draft form, has also been used by Croatian test makers. As reported by the Council of Europe, the 'primary aim of this Manual is to help the providers of examinations to develop, apply and report transparent, practical procedures in a cumulative process of continuing improvement in order to situate their examination(s) in relation to the Common European Framework (CEF).' (Language Policy Division, 2009, page 1). However, the Manual does not prescribe how to construct an examination to conform to the CEFR (Language Policy Division, 2009). It recommends a set of four activities that would contribute to the validation process and these activities (familiarisation, specification, standardisation and empirical validation) have been conducted, more or less successfully, by the Croatian team as well. Of course, this is an ongoing process for the language test makers and it has not finished yet.

Another problem in relating exams to the levels of the CEFR has been the issue of the Croatian secondary school modern foreign language curriculum. Namely, the existing curriculum documents had been created before the CEFR came into existence and started to have an influence on language education documents in European countries (Prpic, 2009). The curriculum states what needs to be done by the students for each of the language skills in each grade, but these needs are either stated too vaguely or can not be related to any level of the CEFR by description alone (Prpic, 2009). However, the latest curriculum for the primary schools has described the levels of competence of the students in relation to the CEFR, and this was used as a starting point (along with the results of previous research done on the students of that age) for the modern foreign language exam for the first grade of grammar schools. For the rest of the grades, the test makers had even fewer documents on which to base their claims in relation to the CEFR.

Another important issue in relating examinations to the CEFR is the description of language production at each of the levels. The CEFR states what the language user is able to do, and gives a very general definition of the language the user can manage. However, that is not enough for test developers. Testing needs to be precise and testing language means clearly knowing what kind of language the test is testing. Some languages already have documents that define what precisely a description in the CEFR means for their

language (e.g. German and Spanish). The descriptions of language production for English are still being developed (Kurteš and Saville, 2008).

The case of English language examinations

The problems described in the previous section could be better illustrated by providing an example. Since I have mostly been working on the development of the English language examinations and am thus most familiar with them, and since the English language examinations have been taken by a large majority of students in Croatian secondary schools, I will use the development of English language examinations as an example of the issues that had to be dealt with by the stakeholders in the Croatian educational system.

What is being tested in the English language examinations?

Of the four basic language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), Croatian English language examinations are testing three – reading, writing and listening. In the first year, the examination tested only two skills – reading and writing. It also had a separate subtest for testing the use of English. The use of English does not have a separate subtest any more because it is considered that the use of English is tested throughout the entire examination. There have also been some preparations made for the testing of the speaking skill. However, a decision has been made that the speaking skill will not be tested in the examinations for now.

The development of the examinations

The first examinations were to be administered in May 2006. The group of experts (consisting of English language secondary school teachers and university professors) that was selected to develop the exams began work in 2005. Their first task was deciding at which level they were going to set the examination for the first grade of grammar schools. Their aim was to develop the examinations to not only have national, but also international validity, and so they decided to try to relate their examinations to the CEFR. For the first grade of grammar schools they decided upon level A2 according to the CEFR because the existing Croatian curriculum for the primary schools sets the standard for the students who have been studying English as a first foreign language at A2 according to the CEFR (Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa, 2006). Previous research has also indicated that at the end of primary school the students reach the level A2 according to the CEFR (NCVVO, 2006). Since the first examination was not a high stakes test, the test developers were allowed to ‘test the waters’ and check whether the students were at the level they were supposed to be at the end of primary school. The examination had no pass rate so it cannot be said which percentage of the students passed or failed the examination set at level A2, but the average percentage of points attained on the English examination was 80% (NCVVO, 2006). Such a relatively high result encouraged the experts to aim the examination level for the next grade at B1 according to the CEFR.

The following year, 2007, the examination took place in February. The examination was taken by a sample of second-grade grammar school students. Again, the examination was low stakes. However, this year, an official threshold for passing the level had been set. The experts set it at 70% achieving the level B1, but 22% of the students failed to achieve this level (NCVVO, 2007). This provided valuable information for setting the standard for the following grades. The low-stakes examination for the third grade, and then the secondary-school leaving exam, was thus aimed at a level higher, B2 according to the CEFR, because this would give the students two years to prepare for the level of the high-stakes secondary school leaving examination.

The national examinations in English, as well as other modern foreign languages, Croatian and mathematics, could be taken at two different levels in 2008. These levels were supposed to accommodate the varying levels of competence of students of different interests and from different types of secondary schools. That year, it was decided that all the students attending all the types of four-year secondary schools could take the examination, and not just grammar school students, in order to ensure that all the students wishing to take the secondary school leaving exam as an entrance exam to universities could do so. For the English examination, the higher level was aimed at the level B2 in accordance with the plan from the previous year. The basic level was aimed at level B1 according to the CEFR, but that has proven to be somewhat too high for all the students. This would be corrected the following year in which the examinations were taken in a similar manner, only the basic level of the examination was to be set at A2 according to the CEFR. This was changed because the basic level has now been defined by the curriculum for those types of secondary schools that have the lowest number of classes of English as a foreign language, and level B1 was estimated by the experts to be too high for them. The results of the examination taken on the previous year at level B1 have also shown the average percentage of points on the examination to be somewhat below 50% (NCVVO, 2008).

Because of that, in 2009 the students were able to choose between two levels, A2 and B2, according to their preferences and according to the requirements of the faculty in which they wished to enrol. The national examination in 2009 was administered to third-grade students and it was an actual simulation of the secondary school leaving exam which they are going to take next year, 2010. This is why this was the first year where the experts were able to determine the thresholds for particular marks the students could get on the examination, including the number of points needed to pass the examination (NCVVO, 2009). The number of points needed to pass the examination doesn't necessarily correspond to the number of points needed to satisfy the criteria of the level according to the CEFR tested on the examination.

The issues and challenges encountered in developing English language examinations

Since 2005, when the experts involved in making English language examinations started their work on the project, many things have improved. The test developers have received a substantial amount of training from experts in the field of testing and have applied their newfound knowledge to make significant improvements in the examinations each year,

not only in the area of item writing, but also in the area of validity and test construction. Psychometric analyses have shown that the examinations show a satisfying degree of reliability (NCVVO, 2007. and NCVVO, 2009.). Some of the procedures needed to develop and mark the exams have become so perfected that they are now a routine but some are still in development and need more practice.

Of course, there are still areas that need work. For example, the present examinations do not test the speaking skill. Not only does this prevent the results of the examination from presenting a complete picture of the test taker's language competence, but it also sends a wrong message to the teachers and the students; namely, that they should focus more attention on the other skills, and not the speaking skill, because the students will not be required to speak on the examination. However, plans are being made to include the speaking skill on the examination. In fact, research has been conducted, as well as trial examinations on a sample of students, to test the feasibility of the project. However, in spite of preparations, testing speaking on a national sample is a big undertaking and should be planned wisely. It would demand a lot of financial planning and most importantly, a substantial number of trained experts. Of course, this can also be looked at as an opportunity to train the teachers to become more proficient at teaching and testing speaking in schools.

Also, even though a lot has been done to relate the examinations to the CEFR, there is still more that can be done to ensure that the exams are really linked to a certain level of the CEFR. For example, the exams could be externally validated by testing the students with another test or testing other groups of students with the same test. Some steps have already been taken to include the Croatian examinations project into the international English Profile Programme and more activities are expected in the coming period.

In general, there should be more opportunities to pre-test the tasks or even the entire tests because the secondary school leaving examination is a high-stakes exam and it should be as reliable and as discriminating as possible. Of course, because of the fact that the secondary school leaving examination is a high-stakes examination it is difficult to pre-test the examination or even the individual tasks and not risk them being exposed to the students before they should be. Hopefully, this problem will be solved and a systematic solution could be found.

Another problematic area is item writing. Currently, there are only four experts writing the items and there need to be more trained people involved in item writing. This would mean finding the people capable of writing items, training them and finding the most suitable way for them to be involved in the item writing process. Also, even though the experts who are currently working as item writers have received a lot of training and have a lot of experience in item writing, they could still benefit from additional training or at least consultancy from language testing experts from other countries or institutions.

However, the biggest challenge, but also the biggest opportunity, in the coming period will probably be the reform of the curriculum. The current curriculum is outdated and the test developers had to make a lot of modifications to fit it into the current six-level system described by the CEFR. Of course, they still had to work within the limits of the curriculum and not add anything that is not already there. The new English curriculum

is an unknown at this moment. It is not even known who will be writing it. Hopefully, whoever will be writing it will take into consideration the knowledge and the experience of the experts who have been developing the exams, as well as their exam specifications and the results on the exams. They can provide a wealth of data and empirical evidence on what the students actually know at each stage of the educational system. In fact, one of the purposes of these exams has been to provide empirical data needed for the reform of the curriculum. It is now up to the people responsible for writing the curriculum to recognise and utilise that source.

The future of the exams

In only a few years the introduction of external assessment into Croatian education has contributed to significant changes in the system. The teachers throughout Croatia have been systematically introduced to the modern approaches in teaching and testing and given guidance on what is expected from their students at the end of particular stages in the educational process. The students can now also know well in advance what they must know when they leave secondary school and want to enroll into university. The curriculum planners can also utilise this information to create a curriculum that responds to the needs of all the stakeholders in the system.

However, the most valuable thing that has come out of the project has been the development of the discussion on standards and the state of teaching and learning in Croatian education. A lot of questions have been raised and a lot of problems have come out into the open, and, what is most important, they are being dealt with. The examinations have been a valuable indicator of the situation in education, but also a catalyst for the changes that need to be made. The idea of introducing a high-stakes external examination has brought a sense of urgency to prepare everybody for it in the best possible manner.

All of this has been very positive for the system and hopefully the stakeholders, and especially the decision makers, will continue to use the examinations and the challenges which everybody has been encountering since their introduction as an opportunity to improve the current situation in Croatian education.

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