**The *Platform of resources and references
for plurilingual and intercultural education* in relation to "vulnerable" groups**

As indicated from its introductory presentation, this *Platform* is a new instrument of the Language Policy Division which, subsuming the CEFR, is designed to enable member states to prepare their syllabi concerning languages of schooling and all other language instruction, according to aims such as their contribution to social cohesion and the development of democratic intercultural citizenship. This instrument is technical as much as political, exactly like the CEFR itself, being harnessed to a quality educational scheme for Europe which has already been defined: plurilingual and intercultural education.

The perspective that gives this education its structure concerns the [rights held by all to receive a language education](). In it, the curriculum is defined as a pathway of learning experience offered to the learners. Its main aspiration is to ensure that learners recognise and valorise the repertoire of languages and speech forms which they possess, and extend this to a broader command of genres of spoken and textual expression in languages they already know or are to acquire: languages of schooling, other languages taught as school subjects, languages and speech forms used for subject-specific skills, other social uses of languages and of their linguistic varieties than those they already use. The purpose is to ensure their self-development and full social participation.

Vulnerable groups
The whole of society is involved with the role and the results of education, since personal education, access to knowledge and school achievement depend substantially on language competences. Yet the elements of this *Platform* that relate to languages of schooling have a more specific bearing on young learners because the platform is focused on compulsory schooling and forms of secondary education. Children are deemed to be one of the potentially "vulnerable" groups in Council of Europe terminology. The Council of Europe texts refer to *vulnerable* persons, citizens or groups who are designated as such in many Recommendations; for example, R (90) 22 of the Committee of Ministers on the protection of mental health explicitly concerns *certain vulnerable groups in society*, such as children, ethnic minorities, disaster victims and the elderly. More broadly, the book *Concerted development of social cohesion indicators - Methodological guide*[1] views as vulnerable groups minorities, migrants, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and women. Their vulnerability is defined in terms of their poor integration into society, social cohesion being the ability of society sustainably to ensure the well-being of all its members. Social cohesion is identifiable according to four criteria (op. cit. p. 23):

- equitable access to available resources (non-discrimination);
- the respect and dignity that stem from recognition by others[2];
- personal and collective autonomy, the foundation for each person's development (*Bildung*);
- responsible participation and in particular the ability to organise in defence of one's interests.

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[1] Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, 2005.
[2] See A. Caillé (ed.) (2007)*: La quête de la reconnaissance. Nouveau phénomène social total*, Editions de la Découverte, Paris.

Marginalisation of groups or persons in a position of vulnerability can be done through any form of violence, intimidation or ill-treatment[3] or through *de facto* mechanisms of exclusion which are diffuse and only minimally resort to coercion or force. Moreover, this occurs in many realms of life such as health, housing, employment and education.

Linguistic vulnerability
We need at this juncture to characterise the nature of what might be vulnerability in certain children's linguistic competences (or in their communication through language). This vulnerability may take different forms. Access to schooling is not equitable if the learners' first language is not taught in schools as a subject and as a language of instruction for teaching other subjects. This is the case with recently arrived migrant children or children from indigenous minorities in polities where their regional language is not recognised. Lack of recognition is possible for all languages lacking official or dominant status, whether regional /minority or foreign. This exclusion of the other person's languages may be realised as linguistic intolerance founded on negative social representations (which are widespread where languages other than one's own are concerned), rejection, prohibition (in the school setting, in social life) or negation of existence. These ethnocentric phenomena, potentially akin to racism or forming a manifestation thereof, are very widespread and thus constitute one of the essential attitudes to cope with in plurilingual and intercultural education.

These forms of discrimination, possibly attended by a certain real or symbolic violence, for example where identities are being negotiated, do not just concern visibly alien languages, those of foreigners, but also operate with varieties of the official/national languages. Two socio-linguistic concepts are then relevant, that of linguistic insecurity and the one too readily termed *linguistic deficit*, wrongfully attributed to Bernstein and assimilated to the antithesis of *restricted code /elaborated code*. These are a subject of extensive debate that cannot be reiterated here; we shall simply recall a few analytical elements of these central concepts.

Among the many definitions of linguistic insecurity put forward, let us single out Francard's: *manifestation of an unsuccessful quest for legitimacy* [the outcome of] *a conflict between the legitimate language and a non-legitimate or devalued form of the same language*[4]. In an earlier inquiry (conducted in southern Wallonia), he demonstrated that the most insecure individuals were not speakers of the dialect and the less proficient speakers of French, but those with the most schooling: […] *their schooling has enabled them to realise the extent of the gulf between the legitimacy of the linguistic usages documented in their community – which they apply without acknowledging the fact – and the legitimacy of "proper usage" conveyed by school as an institution. Through school, they have become spokesmen for their own self-ostracism*[5]. To specify a distinction between statutory insecurity and formal insecurity drawn by Calvet, Coste[6] points out that linguistic insecurity has implications for identity and is not confined to speakers' ability to use another language and to their conceptualisation of these proficiencies. Thus "insecurity arises because of a perceived,

[3] H. Brown (2004): *Violence against vulnerable groups*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg.

[4] M. Francard (ed.) (1993 and 1994) : *L'insécurité linguistique dans les communautés francophones périphériques* Cahiers de l'Institut de linguistique de Louvain-la-Neuve, vol. 1 and vol. 2.
[5] M. Francard (1989): Insécurité linguistique de diglossie, le cas de l'Ardenne belge, Revue québécoise de linguistique théorique et appliquée 1989 8/éé 133-63
[6]Coste, D., Compétence bi/plurilingue et (in)sécurité linguistique, *Atti del Convegno Valle d'Aosta regione d'Europa : l'Educazione bi/plurilingue, ponte verso la cittadinanza europea*, 4 September 2001, Centro Congressi, Saint-Vincent, edited by Viviana Duc, Ufficio Ispettivo Tecnico, in collaboration with the journal L'École Valdôtaine, (supplement to issue no. 54) http://www.scuole.vda.it/Ecole/Atti/05.htm.

conceptualised, internalised and embodied inferiority that has taken hold"[7]. This insecurity, built on a self-appraisal but generated within and by means of social interactions, can eventually cease to be seen as linked to material situations but rather as intrinsic to the speaker, the more so with adaptation to the social norms of verbal communication being complicated by the multiplication of the agencies of socialisation (family, school, peer groups, media, etc.) which may have distinctive and divergent norms of language. It is easy to appreciate how alienating this sense of insecurity is in that it impairs each person's capabilities for development and self-respect.

The foregoing remarks have allowed us to bring up the strategic role of school as an institution in learners' exposure to norms and in the internalisation of some learners' inability to appropriate them. This relationship with linguistic norms which are considered to have been appropriated, is also formed in families, as evidenced by the work of Bernstein[8]. His research revealed systematic differences in the language behaviour of children from well-off families and from the working class, this behaviour being marked by differing degrees of complexity of the linguistic code (elaborated/restricted code) in social communication. The term *code* has no doubt greatly detracted from comprehension of Bernstein in so far as, being founded on lexical and morphological-syntactic data, it seems to rigidify expressive capacities which are not susceptible of evolution, thus giving credence to a construction placed on these differences as a transmitted and acquired deficiency/handicap. But it is not so much a matter of unavailable linguistic resources with the restricted code, acquired only in certain job contexts, whereas the elaborated code cuts across more numerous situations of communication. The restricted code should probably be interpreted not as missing linguistic resources but as absence of the use of such resources which in some cases become unreachable precisely because they are seldom or never drawn upon. It is not so much the linguistic code which typifies differences of language complexity in communication activities, as the experience of diversity in communication situations (and their peculiar rules/norms/conventions) and the awareness of their variability, even where the restricted code may appear to be universally acquired. Bernstein says precisely this: "the types of families offer choices of different roles" (1975: 31) and "an open system of roles tends to encourage expression of new meanings and exploration of a complex conceptual field whereas a closed system of roles discourages invention and limits the conceptual field explored" (1976: 199).

Plurilingual and intercultural education: open/closed discursive repertoires
Within the terms of this *Platform*, it might be said that the differences in children's (and adults') language performance stem from the differences in opportunities to handle varied communication situations (= open repertoire): this experience, limited by comparison with those of other speakers, leads to the formation of repertoires of speech patterns (and of languages) limited to what is current in the agencies of immediate socialisation (family, neighbourhood, peers). One of the clearly stated goals of plurilingual and intercultural education is

- to do justice to learners in their need to broaden their experience of verbal communication and their language repertoire /discourse genres;
- to make them aware of the situational/social variability of these discursive forms, by moving from a perspective based on absolute norms (*proper/poor speech*), underpinning the rampant social discrimination, to a perspective of contextual and cultural social suitability, varying from one community of communication to the next.

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[7] D. Coste, *op. cit.*
[8] B. Bernstein 1977*: Language and social classes*, French translation published by Editions de Minuit, Paris.

This right to experience diversity of discursive modes, not equated to experiencing negation of a language's intrinsic norm, is of particular relevance for certain school populations (especially migrant children and young people, and pupils with underprivileged backgrounds) who may be deemed to command "restricted" repertoires in that these do not ready them to grasp the fine points and use the discursive forms of the language of schooling correctly (in the light of the intrinsic norms) and suitably.

Without engaging with these linguistic debates, however crucial, more extensive analyses may be mentioned by way of example, such as the one by Jariene and Razmantiene (2006): *The influence of pupils' socio-economic background on achievements in reading and writing skills*. This national survey on assessment of school attainments was launched in Lithuania from 2002 onwards. It is chiefly aimed at discovering the principal factors which influence learners' results and attainments, particularly as regards the main language of schooling (Lithuanian), its written acquisition and written production. The hypothesis concerns the influence of the pupils' family socio-economic status, expressed as a model with indicators such as number of books available at home, how many of them belong personally to the pupil, educational resources (encyclopaedias, dictionaries, computers, Internet access), how much pocket money per week is allowed by parents; eligibility for the free school breakfast (prescribed for pupils from poor and socially disadvantaged families); parents' employment situation and educational standard, etc. The overall conclusion is that a fairly strong correlation exists between a pupil's socio-economic background and the standard reached in reading and writing: those coming from privileged surroundings have better results. Linear regression analysis of the variables in the model demonstrates that the socio-economic factor may account for about 12 % of the results obtained by a pupil in reading and writing.

This concern for disadvantaged and vulnerable children is central to the present *Platform.* For example it can be read in *Writing*:

> There have been different opinions on how children can best develop their writing abilities. Advocates of an intuitive, natural-development approach claim that a sense of form and genre in writing will develop automatically through reading as long as the students are provided with opportunities to develop their own ideas. Others argue that an intuitive approach favours learners from privileged backgrounds who already have implicit knowledge of text forms.
> […]
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> While some children benefit from backgrounds which automatically offer socializing into academic uses of language, children in vulnerable groups are dependent on school to help them understand and learn the wide spectre of cultural codes embedded in formal language use. Especially for these children curriculum aims like participation and access remain empty phrases if not directly connected to acquisition of a broad notion of language for many purposes.
> […]
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> Teaching writing in homogeneous groups is often based on implicitly expected knowledge of text and cultural codes. However, when teaching writing in different genres to minority groups, the need for making the implicit explicit becomes evident and urgent. Learners from minority backgrounds and possibly different traditions for writing genres, purposes and styles will have to get acquainted with the cultural

conventions of writing in and outside school. This means special attention to specific writing for this group of learners as well as for other vulnerable groups who need special attention. One may however emphasise that coming from another cultural background does not necessarily represent a problem for the individual learner or for the classroom situation. Comparative perspectives on different traditions for genres and texts in different societies may indeed enhance plurilingual competences for the minority learner as well as for the majority group.

[…]

Any endeavour to clarify teaching goals by spelling out the results implicitly expected, which are central to equitable assessment of attainment, is bound to further the democratisation of school, because school could then no longer be accused of assessing knowledge and proficiencies which it does not really teach and which are transmitted socially in other settings. Even more importantly than being indispensable reference points for credible formative assessments, descriptors that allow plurilingual and intercultural education to be organised as an itinerary of discursive and linguistic experiences and as the aggregation of reflexive acquisitions of adaptable competences should make it possible to cater more adequately for vulnerable groups as well as all other learners.

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