

# **LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION POLICY PROMOTING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

*Guide for the development of Language Education Policies in  
Europe – From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*

## **Reference Study**

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## Preface

This text, part of a series published by the *Language Policy Division*, is clearly significant in its own right because it deals with certain influential factors in the organisation and sociolinguistic foundations of language teaching and in the linguistic ideologies at work in problems related to the languages of Europe. It is however part of a larger project since it is one element of a collection of publications focused on the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe: From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*.

This *Guide* is both a descriptive and programmatic document whose purpose is to demonstrate the complexity of the questions involved in language teaching, often dealt with in a simplistic manner. It aims to describe the processes and conceptual tools needed for the analysis of educational contexts with respect to languages and for the organisation of language learning and teaching according to the principles of the Council of Europe.

There are several versions of this *Guide* for different audiences, but the full version deals with a number of complex questions, albeit in a limited framework. It seemed necessary to illustrate these questions with case studies, syntheses and studies of specific sectors of language teaching, dealing in monographic form with questions only touched upon in the *Guide*. These *Reference Studies* provide a context for the *Guide*, showing its theoretical bases, sources of further information, areas of research and the themes which underlie it.

The *Modern Languages Division*, now the *Language Policy Division*, demonstrates through this collection of publications its new phase of activity, which is a continuation of previous activities. The *Division* disseminated through the *Threshold Levels* of the 1970s, a language teaching methodology more focused upon communication and mobility within Europe. It then developed on the basis of a shared educational culture, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (published in its final version in 2001). This is a document which is not concerned with the nature of the contents of language teaching but rather with the form of curricula and syllabi for language teaching. The *Framework* proposes explicit referential levels for identifying degrees of language competence, and thus provides the basis for differentiated management of courses so that opportunities for the teaching of more languages in schools and in lifelong learning are created. This recognition of the intrinsic value of plurilingualism has simultaneously led to the development of an instrument which allows each learner to become aware of and to describe their language repertoire, namely the *European Language Portfolio*. Versions of this developed in member States are manifold and were at the heart of the European Year of Languages (2001).

Plurilingualism has been identified in numerous *Recommendations* of the Council of Europe as the principle and the aim of language education policies, and must be valued at the individual level as well as being accepted collectively by educational institutions. The *Guide* and the *Reference Studies* provide the link between teaching methods and educational issues on the one hand and policy on the other, and have the function of making explicit this political principle and of describing concrete measures for implementation.

In this study Willems deals with one of the consequences of changes in the aims of language teaching which are in turn an effect of social and political change. If language learning is to involve learners in understanding other cultures than their own, which it surely must in the European context and beyond, then teachers will need a different kind of training to that which prepares them to focus on the structures of language. In this study Willems explains why and how language teaching must take this path and then discusses with practical examples what needs to be done in teacher education.

This specific aspect of the problems of language education policies in Europe gives a perspective on the general view taken in the *Guide* but nonetheless this text is a part of the fundamental project of the *Language Policy Division*: to create through reflection and exchange of experience and expertise, the consensus necessary for European societies, characterised by their differences and the transcultural currents which create 'globalised nations', not to become lost in the search for the 'perfect' language or languages valued at the expense of others. They should rather recognise the plurality of the languages of Europe and the plurilingualism, actual or potential, of all those who live in this space, as a condition for collective creativity and for development, a component of democratic citizenship through linguistic tolerance, and therefore as a fundamental value of their actions in languages and language teaching.

Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram

*'At the same time, I also, being interested in language and language acquisition, hope that people will tend to acquire languages other than their own for pleasure and knowledge. Even though I may be able to communicate with a Brazilian in English, I only learn about Brazil, or deeply about Brazil, when I communicate in Portuguese'. (from an interview with Julian Amery, in: Graddol and Meinhof (eds), 1999: 18)*

## **1. Aims of this study**

This study aims at presenting in an organised fashion how the intercultural dimension of language learning can be integrated into the language teacher education curriculum. How it is central to what we prepare learners for. How they can acquire a feeling for cross-cultural problems and the skills of dealing with them in a positive spirit. Of course, if teachers are to be able to work these ideas into their teaching, most certainly their educators must be inspired to co-operate in establishing a common curriculum, incorporating an analysis of oral and written communication, and the design of teaching materials based upon it. Student teachers of languages, across the range of languages offered, will thus be sensitised to what unites them: helping their later learners to cope with the complexities of intercultural communication. Experiences by student teachers during residence in 'their' target language countries, should play a major role in this sensitisation process. Co-operation during their training will help them to stop considering themselves in competition with one another. It will help them become aware of a shared and responsible task. Where residence abroad is a problem for geographical or economic reasons another didactic approach needs to be introduced. Such an approach will be dealt with under 5.

The need for change in teacher education is a consequence of changes in the contemporary world and the language policies which attempt to accommodate those changes. As a first stage therefore we shall consider context and policy before suggesting how teacher education needs to respond.

## **2. Language policy**

Language policy is always rooted in context. Let us consider three such contexts, political, cultural and global, and explore their importance.

### **2.1 The political context**

There was a time when the lack of command by Europeans of European languages other than their own was considered by the European Commission as 'the Achilles heel' of European unification. This time seems somewhat disturbingly behind us. At present, discussions seem to be concerned mainly with solving cumbersome communication problems at government level. The basic question in these discussions is whether we have to 'go for' English alone, or for English and French, and possibly German, Spanish and Italian, as so-called 'bridge-languages'.

The debate, after smouldering beneath the surface for a long time, was recently re-initiated with the prospect of the Union's extension to include central European language speaking countries. Translation, spoken or written, so the argument runs, will amount to such an investment of time and money that other, simpler and less costly, solutions, will have to be found<sup>1</sup>. Besides, European Parliament members admit that, in spite of costly translation facilities, they often cannot make sense of what they hear in their earphones in their own language, miss or misinterpret important points or, as a consequence, even vote wrongly. Forcing monolinguals to use a *lingua franca* foreign to them cannot be the solution. Indeed, democratic debate will suffer as it will be restricted to monologues for lack of easy command of the *lingua franca* by the speakers. Furthermore, voters at home may no longer be able to follow what their representatives in the European Parliament say and lose interest in the European democratic process. Moreover, the use of one lingua franca like English may give what has been called a 'false sense of mutual intelligibility' (Garcia and Otheguy, 1989) and legal texts, for obvious reasons, will have to be translated anyway.

So, linguistic diversity should be an option in spite of voices claiming it cannot automatically be a first choice (van Els, 2000; Grin, 1997). No doubt, the debate will rage on for some time to come<sup>2</sup>. When all is said and done, however, there are additional and convincing reasons that plead for language diversity and plurilingualism in Europe and the world, as we shall see below.

## **2.2 The cultural context**

While the 'utilitarian' discussion referred to above is, and has been, carried on at a European administrative and economic level, another aspect of foreign language command has increasingly been receiving attention. Arguments of an educational instead of a utilitarian nature began to be brought forward and claims were made for an extension of foreign language teaching, and for raising its quality. These arguments were already discussed in the closing conference of Council of Europe Project N° 12 '*Language learning in Europe: the challenge of diversity*' in 1988. Language command in the Council's project was directly related to opening up the rich potential of our European cultural heritage as laid down in our many languages. At the same time, if the quality of foreign language teaching could be raised and tuned in to the demands made by intercultural communication, Europe's chances of real unification would look better in time.

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<sup>1</sup> Statisticians have calculated that the present situation with 11 working languages and 110 translation combinations would develop into a true Babylon with another 20 official languages and 380 translation combinations.

<sup>2</sup> As for a language policy in the European Union countries, renewed attention is asked for a proposal launched in 1991. It is in keeping with the conviction that plurilingualism in a continent like Europe should be the norm rather than the exception. The proposal appeared in ATEE's periodical *European Journal of Teacher Education* (Willems, 1991). It suggests that speakers of a romance language should learn at least one Germanic language, and vice versa. Speakers of other languages may have to learn two: one Romance and one Germanic.



### **2.3 The global context**

After some years, in the wake of advances in cultural anthropological, bio-cultural and ethnographic studies, the European discussion broadened to include global issues like the world's bio-cultural diversity and even the survival of mankind (Kramsch, 1993; Buffet and Willems, 1995; Willems, 1996a, 1996b; Maffi, 1996; Young, 1996). In the context of doubts about the future of the global community in the long run, arguments have been brought forward to improve the quality of cross-cultural communication. The fear is that our civilisation might come to grief if we do not succeed in learning to communicate more successfully. Young and others look for a way out of our growing predicament by developing a common 'tongue'. As Young has it:

There is, perhaps, no more important topic in the social sciences than the study of intercultural communication. Understanding between members of different cultures was always important, but it has never been as important as it is now. ... it is a matter of the survival of our species. ... While we are clearly more involved in each other's lives than ever before, we appear no less deeply involved in brutal rejection of each other. While more people from more cultures are communicating and co-operating across differences, as many, it seems, are killing and maiming each other in the name of cultural and religious identity. ... The dilemma of the global age is that ... we are profoundly divided by race, culture and belief and we have yet to find a tongue in which we can speak our humanity to each other. (Young, 1996, p.2)

Young is worried about the narrow definition presently in use of communicative competence. It seems to force non-Native Speakers (NNS) learning a foreign language to adapt to the host culture and criticise it at their peril. The 'tongue' Young speaks about in the quotation above is clearly not 'a language' like a global *lingua franca*. What he means is many languages, used in a spirit of co-operation, of negotiation of meaning, of a global knowledge about cultural diversity and of respect for differences. In this sense, mastery of languages as carriers of cultural identity in all its diversity opens new perspectives and could thus well contribute to world peace. We oppose herewith pessimists of global or European co-operation who argue that cultural differences are the ultimate stumbling blocks on our road to a better world.

### **2.4 Conclusion and signposts for language teaching**

All this leads to one conclusion: high quality foreign language command plays a major role in the future development of our global community. The fact that human agents are capable of reflection and understanding and the fact that we have achieved sufficient insight into the complexities of cultural identity and cross-cultural communication, form the two basic pillars on which such high quality language teaching must rest. In addition to, and integrated with, the 'mechanics' of foreign languages like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and

functional aspects, the teaching of foreign languages needs to cover the development of the learners' readiness to open up to difference and its negotiation.

Therefore, language teachers, for too long fed on too meagre a diet in their education, need to be offered an exciting field of study in addition to their traditional professional curriculum. This field of study targets *intercultural communication*. The term 'intercultural' is, in itself, normative and carries values, as opposed to 'cross-cultural' which is neutral. Interculturality has moral-ethical dimensions for it incorporates respect for what is different. It requires *knowledge* (of cultural factors), *insight* (into what constitutes cultural identity), *readiness* (towards opening up to cultural differences) and *skills* (in negotiating 'common territory' and identifying and bridging gaps).

The study of intercultural communication, naturally, unites all teachers of foreign languages and should, as such, form part of a (European and even global) teacher education curriculum. It is the area where all foreign language (L2) teachers find common ground. They all face the task of preparing their learners for the ordinary details of everyday communication across cultural borders. Grammatical or lexical correctness, important though it is, may not be the decisive factor in communicative success. Neither may a satisfactory control of language functions, however essential it may be. Even a basic generalised knowledge of the foreign language culture may not be a guarantee of success, as it may lead to or enhance existing stereotypes (Steele and Suozzo, 1994). *Of much greater value in deciding communicative success, over and above these competences, is the ability to create 'common ground' in an interaction, in the awareness that what is being attempted is complex and uncertain.*

### **3. The significance of context in communication**

Communication problems in input dialogues [in traditional foreign language textbooks] at best concern only grammar and lexicon. Helping learners to avoid *linguistic interference* is considered much more important than helping them to identify and negotiate *meaning interference*. (Dams et al., 1998: 116)

The aim of all communication by means of language is to exchange messages. These messages may be ritual, offer information, express emotions, establish or maintain relationships, convince or persuade our interlocutor, or discuss the interaction itself. Decisive for the success of the interaction, in all these types, is the overlap between the two (or more) interactants' reading of the context in which they communicate. Such a context needs to be established first. As Dell Hymes reminds us: 'The key to understanding language in context is to start not with the language but with the context' (Hymes, 1972: 6). If even friendly speakers who share their mother tongue and culture need language to re-establish their relationship after an absence, much more so will speakers of different languages who meet for the first time. They normally feel the need to negotiate a context

before they 'get down to business' of whatever kind. This 'negotiation of context' process is fraught with problems and requires insight into the nature of culture, a willingness to establish real contact and, therefore, context, and the linguistic and pragmatic skills to do so. Let us consider an example taken from real life and witnessed by the present author.

The following dialogue took place on a plane between Milan and Paris carrying home a number of participants in an international conference. Seated in an aisle seat the present author saw two persons he remembered seeing at the conference approaching the seats in front of him. One of them, as appeared in their interaction, is an elderly French academic, and the other a much younger Dutch educationalist with fluent English. The two have seen each other at the conference but not spoken to each other (information given afterwards by the Dutchman on the flight from Paris to Amsterdam). They both stop and the following dialogue emerges:

A is the young Dutchman, B the elderly French academic.

A: Hi! Erm... have you seat B or the window seat?

B: Bonjour, eum... Ah, ... I have to er.. look. Er .. the window seat.

(They install themselves)

A: What a coincidence that we should sit next to each other!

B: Yes, eum .. a coincidence.

A: What did you think of the conference?

B: Well erm .. it was all right.

A: I was quite surprised, you know, by the efficiency of the organisation. I had expected something a bit more erm .. how shall I put it erm .. a bit more erm .. well chaotic is too strong a word but erm ...

B: I eum .. do not understand what you want to say ...

A: Well, you know, there is this European joke about Europe being sheer Hell if all the cooks come from Britain, all the erm.. civil servants from Germany, all the policemen from France..

B: I do not like .. such jokes...

A: Well, anyway, it ends with that everything there is organised by the Italians...

B: That are all stereotypes. Excuse me eum ..

A: I talked to other participants and some said the Italians are very careful when they organise something and do you think the French share with the Italians that you want to organise well, you leave nothing to chance, want to make sure... erm..?

B: Well you have .. eum .. need of some chance if you organise eum .. something big like this congress. Tant de choses peuvent ...

A: [I don't understand,

B: [Oh excusez moi ..

A: ... no no not the French but you said you need chance...

B: You see, eum .. my English is ....

A: No, I think you misunderstood, 'leaving to chance' means not to take risks ..

B: You must excuse me, I cannot follow ... (searches in his bag for something)

A: Well, I see you have other things to do .....  
(taken from Willems, 1996, based on notes taken during the conversation)

What the Dutchman is obviously insufficiently doing here in the eyes of the Frenchman is observing cultural rules in attempting to create a context. He apparently thinks that having attended the same conference provides enough common ground between his fellow-passenger and himself to take things from there. He is clearly unaware that elderly French academics, as a rule, do not appreciate having their private sphere invaded so directly by younger colleagues, certainly not in a language that is not their own. Respect for seniority, on the whole, is natural in French culture. The Dutch egalitarian culture with its small *power distance* is difficult to accept for a Frenchman. Our young educationalist might have started the conversation by asking his fellow-traveller if he spoke English. He might have proceeded by inquiring if communication was at all appreciated, or been more sensitive to the negative signals emitted by the Frenchman. The language for the management of such conversation is notoriously difficult to master in a foreign language (Pouw, 1990). Much strategic manoeuvring might, however, solve, or prevent, many problems. He obviously lacks the sensitiveness referred to above, even though his command of English leaves little to be desired. The Frenchman, in his turn, might have been a little less disconcerted had he known about Dutch directness in making conversation. The results of such encounters are easy to guess. The Dutchman later, on the plane from Paris to Amsterdam, communicated a sense of frustration and impatience with 'these chauvinistic and unapproachable French' and, no doubt, the Frenchman, if he had any stereotypes about the Dutch, had his worst feelings confirmed. Clearly, such encounters are not conducive to European harmony, or the growth of European, or global, citizenship. As suggested above, here lies an important task for foreign language teaching.

An example of written interaction that is more in line with the insights on which this study is built, is the following. At a conference in Amsterdam a Dutch applied linguist conducted a workshop on cross-cultural communication. In the evening a French colleague phoned him to ask for an interview. She had been unable to attend his workshop but had heard from one of her colleagues that it had been concerned with issues very close to her heart. The interview took place in English. The French lady appeared to have lived in the United States for a long time. At the end of the interview it appeared that the applied linguist could 'get by' in French as well. He was asked to send some of his material to the French lady, now living in Paris. He did so and, in addressing his contact in the letter, he realised that in his mind he was on first name terms with her. Still, writing in French made him hesitate, aware as he was of possible differences in how the lady and himself had 'read' the context. So he started with: 'Chère madame, chère Nadine', and in his first line put the problem up for discussion. Was it all right if he addressed her by her first name? The reply came with a grateful recognition of his sensitiveness, and that in time it would be fine if they addressed each other by their first names, but that until they had got to know each other better she preferred 'Chère Madame'! As they did not meet in person after this first

encounter, they still head their letters in the, at least to the Dutch, and many English and Americans, rather distant and formal way employed in their first written communication. The negotiation avoided a possible clash, although there is some frustration on the part of the Dutchman. Frustration, however, is the lesser evil if we compare it to the blockade that might have resulted from a blunt insistence on, to the French, unacceptable familiarity.

#### **4. Towards intercultural language teacher education**

It is ... entirely within the spirit of the Council of Europe's overall approach to the learning and teaching of languages for communication that teachers should be encouraged, educated and trained to act, not as retailers of packaged materials and methods they have not chosen and do not understand in any depth, but as empirical investigators of this teaching/learning process in which they and the learners are engaged. (Trim, 1987: 6)

... it has become the custom to teach foreign languages in secondary schools as if pupils were to become tourists and holidaymakers in the foreign country. They have the language needed for survival in such situations and are given some 'useful' but rather superficial information about the country in question. This however has no effect on their view of their own identity and that of others; they are implicitly invited to remain firmly anchored in their own values and culture. (Byram, 1992: 11)

These quotations point the way in our discussion of new directions in language teacher education. Teachers will have to be educated to be real professionals, who do not slavishly follow what others have designed for them, but are able to anticipate their learners' needs and professionally cater for them. The vital elements in the competence and skills of the foreign language teacher have been discussed at length in a publication of the Association of Teacher Education in Europe (Willems, 1993). We shall return to them under 4.5 in order to relate the intercultural component expounded in this study to the components enumerated there. The socio-cultural and psychological aspects of intercultural communication form an as yet underexposed, but vital element in a language teacher's professional competence. Indeed, culture and cultural studies, in the sense suggested by Byram in the above quotation, will have to become an integral part of language teacher education (Riley, 1991; Kramsch, 1993; Buffet and Willems, 1995; Willems, 1996a; Dams et. al, 1998).

##### **4.1 Culture**

The best introduction to intercultural (foreign) language teaching starts with a discussion of what culture is and on which points cultures generally differ. Culture in an attractive modern definition is: 'the collective mental programming which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (Hofstede, 1991: 16). He considers the human mind a computer which

needs programming before it can start doing what it is supposed to do. Once programmed, it is very difficult to change. If a new programme (culture) is installed on top of another, there will be clashes. Unlearning something is much more difficult than learning something for the first time. Previously we have called culture 'logic' in the sense of : 'the presupposed knowledge in the conduct of everyday life' (Holland and Quinn, 1991: 1). It takes a lot of effort to acquire another sort of logic, or even open up to other 'logics'. Even what we call a 'lie', so Holland and Quinn (op. cit.) tell us, appears to have different social effects in different cultures.

Hofstede's global IBM research project, the HERMES/IBM survey among 116,000 IBM employees in 70 countries (Hofstede, 1980/1984) corroborates older sociological theory as to four major factors on which cultures may differ. Hofstede distinguishes: *power relationships* between people; the *masculine* (assertive) or *feminine* (caring) orientation of society; the orientation (*collective or individual*) of its members towards society; and, *the handling of conflict and uncertainty* (Hofstede, 1991). The communicative problems caused by differing cultural orientation between the participants become apparent, for instance, if we take the role played by the first factor: '*power distance*'. We saw, for instance, how the French academic in our earlier dialogue, used to being treated with reverence, loathed the way he was accosted by the Dutchman. Also the third factor (*collective vs individualistic orientation of society*) may cause communicative havoc when negotiating context. Collectively organised societies have what Hall (1976) calls a 'high context' culture. This means there is relatively little need of exchanging information, as most of it is 'given' by the setting, or presupposed in the partner's knowledge. 'Low context' (more *individualistically organised*) cultures need an explicit code to formulate information to a much larger extent. Negotiation of what is meant by what is said between representatives of such cultures is inevitable here. Drawing up business contracts between Japan (*collectively organised*) and the USA (*individualistically organised*) is, therefore, not easy.

Lastly, an example may suffice to illustrate the pitfalls inherent in the factor: *dealing with uncertainty*. Asked how they would solve continuous misunderstanding and irritation between the production-manager and the sales-manager in a business which threatens to become bankrupt, rather large groups of French, English and German student answered remarkably differently. The Germans suggested clearing up the *rules*, the French would turn to the director and tell him to bring the two employees to heel (*power distance*). The English found the solution in bringing the two managers together and have them 'sort themselves out', if necessary by joining a course on corporate solidarity. Hofstede offers enlightening tables showing where cultures tend to overlap or are fundamentally different on these four factors. These tables could play a useful role in the education of student teachers of languages.

It is possible, if we define culture as 'social knowledge in the widest sense of the term', (Riley, 1989: 488) to distinguish three types of knowledge, which may help

further in coming to grips with the essence of the concept culture. Riley offers three types: 'know that', 'know of' and 'know how'. Of these three the first and the last are largely accommodated by Hofstede's definition. 'Know that' embodies what people hold true, for instance their political and religious philosophies, their idea of how to manage a concern or school, and of what education, hunting, or history etc. is. It is *relatively stable and permanent background knowledge*. The third, 'know how', covers skills and competences: *how to act* appropriately (use the telephone, buy things in a shop, propose marriage, etc.) and *how to speak* (greet, thank, tell a story, address a superior, etc.). The second 'know of' refers to rather ephemeral knowledge. It is the knowledge of what is currently topical in a society. Without it, understanding headlines in newspapers may be very difficult, even if the words used are all familiar. Riley has interesting suggestions as to the use of cartoons in intercultural language education. As these carry essential cultural information about the society in which they are published they may successfully be used as teaching materials (Riley, 1989).

#### **4.2 Culture in language teacher education**

In many but not yet all European countries, future teachers have the opportunity to spend a period of residence in a country where the language they are studying is spoken. In such cases, student teachers are introduced into culture in general and the target language culture in particular on the points mentioned above. Such an introduction is best given by a team of language teacher educators representing a number of languages. They devise a set of communicative tasks targeting cultural differences. Student teachers should receive training doing such tasks. They should practise interviewing and prepare for recording, transcribing and analysing interviews. These may be held in businesses, in the street, or in the host school of education in the target language country. They should focus on culturally sensitive issues (cf. Hofstede's (1991) four factors) such as management, student staff relationships, conflict-management, as well as politics, religion, politeness and such like. Topics can be found abundantly in the literature mentioned in this study<sup>3</sup>. After their stay abroad, the students are asked to report on their experiences performing these tasks and, subsequently, to write teaching dialogues embodying their experiences. In these dialogues the negotiation of 'social knowledge' or 'mental programming' in order to create what has been called (Kramsch, 1993; Buffet and Willems, 1995) a 'third culture' would clearly loom large. The reporting and writing of materials should preferably take place in a series of 'multilingual' (i.e. across the languages in the curriculum) meetings. In this way the students may learn from each others' experiences and inspire each other in the writing of truly intercultural materials. They may even try their hand at designing dialogues in which speakers representing a range of languages use a *lingua franca*. These will prove to be excellent teaching materials. Their writing will provide equally excellent learning opportunities for the students.

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3. Another rich quarry is the special issue of *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, vol. 9/1 (Zarate et al., 1996).

## 5. Suggestions in case residence abroad is not available

For economic, geographical or even political reasons it may be difficult or impossible to organise a language student teacher's, or even his trainer's, prolonged stay in the target language community. In that case other ways have to be sought to approximate as much as possible to the realisation of the intercultural aims presented here. Not only the language students' awareness of cultural difference and how to deal with it, but also their *esprit de corps* as language specialists across languages may be developed by breaking away from the textbook and bringing in materials and didactic approaches that open their minds to the cultures of the world at large. Next to focusing more on cultural difference in, for instance, the way dialogue is managed in the literary works that traditionally form an important part of the language student teacher's curriculum, teacher educators would need to seek pastures new in designing their curricula.

In doing so, they could contact the target language country's embassy in their country and acquire (e-mail) addresses of sister institutions educating language teachers. Corresponding with their foreign colleagues via e- or snail mail, they could devise information-gap, emotion-gap or opinion-gap dialogues and ask their students to perform them, record them and (partly) transcribe them, along the lines as set out in Willems (1994) and Dams et al. (1998). An exchange of such performances between schools of education could provide them with highly interesting teaching materials which could lead to equally interesting analyses and discussions among their students, not only of linguistic, but more significantly, of cultural differences. The latter would be analysed and discussed on the basis of the determining factors that distinguish cultures as outlined under 4.1. The students could be set the task, after analysis and discussion of their own and the target language performances, to enact the information gap dialogue again, one student playing the role of representative of the target language culture. Under careful guidance of the teacher educator the skill of creating an atmosphere of openness and respect for otherness could very well be practised in this way. The educator should make any emerging stereotypes in such role-plays a topic for intensive discussion.

Another approach could bring language student teachers across the curriculum together in discussing newspaper reports in leading newspapers around the globe of important world events. The various ways in which the press in various countries and the home country deals with current international events, the commentaries given and especially the *letters to the Editor*, harbour an interesting variety of cultural outlooks. In their mother tongue, students studying various foreign languages could detect between them an instructive range of cultural differences and discuss them in some depth.

A third suggestion concerns exchanges of national concepts made visible and recorded on video. Student teachers would be asked in this approach to confer about how to convey their concepts of a number of vital elements in their daily lives. For instance, their concept of their curriculum and the way it takes shape



during their study; their daily routines or their concept of what school is and how it should be organised and managed. They should try and act out their concepts in sketches performed and recorded on video by themselves. The video-recording of their performance is subsequently sent to a co-operating sister institute in the target language country with the request to react to it in a comparable and recordable way. This recording could then be viewed and discussed by the original group of students. An interesting discussion on cultural concepts could be the result, and the negotiation of what is meant by what is expressed could well lead to the opening up of students' minds to other ways of looking at life and its organisation. This idea was first tried out successfully in a French-German co-operation project in which schools in the French-German border area exchanged videotapes recording their cultural concepts of their respective lives at school (Alix and Kodron, 1988).

Lastly there is the idea to exchange cartoons from the national press requesting the partner institute to communicate what the cartoon means to them. This idea, previously referred to under 4.1 above when explaining the 'know of' aspect of culture, was tried out successfully in several Council of Europe seminars and workshops for teacher educators in the 1980s. It leads to a diversity of interpretations based, of course, on the students' own cultural outlook, and may fruitfully be used to help them get an insight into cultural difference. Needless to say, the various cartoons and their interpretations gathered in this way may be used in the home institute to encourage students of all languages in the curriculum to discuss their experiences in exchanging views with 'their' target language country. In this way, language students, independent of which language they study, will be encouraged to co-operate and, in doing so, realise what binds them together.

It stands to reason that student teachers educated on the basis of these kinds of materials and didactic approaches, might be inclined later on as teachers to teach as they were taught. Narrow-minded stereotyping on the part of the pupils might be combated in this way, provided that their teachers have learnt themselves during their education to deal with their stereotypes in a responsible way. Lastly, it goes without saying that the possibilities for intercultural content and the concomitant didactic approach outlined in this paragraph, are eminently usable when foreign residence *is* available. The suggestions blend in with the ideas expressed under 4.2.

## **6. The intercultural component as part of the teacher education curriculum**

In the Council of Europe's Modern Languages project (1971-1981) we find the onset of a more exhaustive formulation of objectives for foreign language teaching and teacher education than laid down in the threshold level proposals presented by the Council up till then. Trim (1981) writes that such goals as 'personal and social development of the individual, capacity for co-operation and

critical thinking, tolerance and understanding should be included in the curriculum'. He was speaking of the school curriculum, but *mutatis mutandis* this statement applies to teacher education. It is not difficult to see how the proposals presented in this study fit in with his claim for the personal and social development of the individual. Also the capacity for co-operation receives ample attention in the above proposals. Student teachers are clearly encouraged to co-operate across languages. Equally, Trim's wish to educate individuals towards tolerance and understanding is met here.

The publication of the European teacher education association ATEE, in its *Cahier 5* (Willems, 1993) on the attainment targets for foreign language teacher education in Europe, stipulates the development of the language teacher's intercultural competence, his/her capacity for co-operation and his social insights and skills. The booklet offers four elements in the competence and skills of language teachers to organise their curriculum. These are: *learner autonomy and language acquisition theory; the European dimension in foreign language teaching; the concept of communicative competence; and the teacher's classroom skills*. In what follows we shall relate our proposals *vis à vis* intercultural competence to these elements.

The didactic proposals given in this study link up with the development of the teachers' autonomy in preparing and executing their lessons, and help their pupils to become more and more autonomous themselves. The essence of the second target, to help the teacher develop a *European* frame of mind, can be extended to include the development of a *global* frame of mind. This, as we have claimed, is a frame of mind characterised by an awareness of the importance of responsible and competent intercultural communication and of preparing learners for it. As to the concept of communicative competence in the third target, we may state that communication in a foreign language *ipso facto* implies cross-cultural communication. Such communication requires the insights and skills set out in this study. Traditional curricular elements like *linguistic* (grammatical, lexical and phonetic) and *pragmatic* knowledge are considered ancillary to intercultural communicative competence. Under Section 3 above, we have seen how we use our *strategic skills* to combine our linguistic, pragmatic and discourse competence with our insights into cultural determiners, to establish the common context that is decisive for communicative success.

Emphasising the centrality of intercultural communication skills in the language teachers' curriculum in this way does not mean we are adding a new element to their curriculum. We advocate a shift towards interculturality in the full realisation that this is what foreign language teaching is all about. Finally, to discuss the fourth target concerning the teacher's classroom skills, it is to be expected that the pairwork and small-group work advocated there will get a new inspiration by the use of the new materials suggested under 4.2 and 5 in this study.

Teachers, and naturally also language teachers, nowadays are considered to be reflective practitioners. The argument for the teaching of languages in an

intercultural orientation will give them plenty of opportunity to reflect, not only on the content of their lessons, but also on the didactic approaches they use.

## 7. Conclusion

Warnings sounded in the literature as to the dangers and inconveniences of monolingualism (Els van, 1994 and 2000; Graddol, 1997: 57), are twofold. First, bi- or plurilinguals will be more flexible and more empathetic communicators. And second, in Graddol's words: 'monolingualism may become a liability which offsets any economic advantage gained from possessing extensive native-speaker resources in the global language' (Graddol, 1997). In the present study an attempt was made to stress a third factor. Learning foreign languages, if done under the guidance of an up-to-date teacher, is a long-term process that opens up the riches of other ways of looking at the world and human communication, and is, as such, one of the most rewarding intellectual activities imaginable. Moreover, once the central issues in intercultural communication have been internalised, language study can be taken up at any time in the learner's life, be it for oral or written communication<sup>4</sup>. Teachers educated to see the importance of the negotiation of contextual, cultural and lexical meaning will no longer settle for just teaching the formal and more or less de-contextualised functional aspects of language as they can be found abundantly in mainstream textbooks in almost exclusively native-speaker to native-speaker input dialogues. They will explicitly invite their learners to open up to other ways of thinking and other types of logic than just their own. Learners will learn to see their own view of the world as just one among many. They will enter into conversations or written contacts with an awareness of their role in the interactional setting. They will know of the complexities inherent in the establishment of context, the naming of topics, and the participation in various types of interaction. Their negotiation skills will be deployed against their knowledge of the main factors determining differences in cultures and a healthy aversion to stereotypes. They will, in short, have a basis on which to find Young's 'tongue in which we can speak our humanity to each other'.

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<sup>4</sup> The *Common European Framework of reference for languages* (Council for Cultural Cooperation, 2001) may assist learners in reflecting on which choices to make in taking up the study of (partial) competences in any (further) language they wish to acquaint themselves with.

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