

Introduction

Plurilingual and intercultural education: challenges and definitions

In this brief introduction I would like to highlight important concepts that we will discuss during this workshop, and I will also talk about some of the challenges that come with this change of perspective.

1. The achievements of the CoE: the path leading up to the publication of the CEFR. Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe: objectives, assessment and certification. Symposium held in Rüslikon, Switzerland. 10 - 16 November 1991.

If we take a look at the original report that led to the CEFR, we note that cooperation is an important topic: cooperation among institutions with the aim of more transparency in language qualifications and cooperation among individuals: course designers, curriculum developers, teachers and, of course, learners.

3. It is desirable to develop a **Common European Framework** of reference for language learning at all levels, in order to:
 - promote and facilitate cooperation among educational institutions in different countries;
 - provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications;
 - assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and coordinate their efforts.

What looks like an administrator's perspective on language learning has led to a surprisingly successful and influential document: the CEFR

CEFR: the effort to come to terms with the question of plurilingualism, to propose a realistic view of how plurilingual speakers use their languages is a core element of the framework.

Chapter 6 describes "plurilingual and pluricultural competence" as generally uneven and dynamic - this lays the ground for a general reflection on language learning and teaching.

- Moving away from the myth of native speaker like competence as the goal of language teaching and learning and
- Replacing this idea with notion of the plurilingual repertoire, which does not consist of the simple addition of monolingual competences, but offers an integrated perspective on what users/learners can do in/with their languages

An important chapter, which leads to our workshop today, discusses the impact on curriculum design.

Chapter 8: principles that focus on an integrated perspective, "*a general language education, in which linguistic knowledge (savoir) and skills (savoir-faire), along with the ability to learn (savoir-apprendre), play not only a specific role in a given language but also a transversal or transferable role across languages*"

The **first** is that discussion on curricula should be in line with the overall objective of promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity.

The **second** principle is that this diversification is only possible, particularly in schools, if the cost efficiency of the system is considered, so as to avoid unnecessary repetition and to promote the economies of scale and the transfer of skills which linguistic diversity facilitates.

The third principle is, therefore, that considerations and measures relating to curricula should not just be limited to a curriculum for each language taken in isolation, nor even an integrated curriculum for several languages. They should also be approached in terms of their role in a general language education, in which linguistic knowledge (*savoir*) and skills (*savoir-faire*), along with the ability to learn (*savoir-apprendre*), play not only a specific role in a given language but also a transversal or transferable role across languages.

CEFR chap. 8.2.1

The publication of the “Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe”, 2007, marks another important step and change of orientation. If the work of the CoE stood mainly for foreign/second language learning, this new document takes a broader view.

It explores ways in which we could change educational systems to allow learners to develop their plurilingual repertoires in educational settings that are characterised by the following two types of coherence.

Horizontally: coherence in the way languages are taught and learnt by bridging the gap between the languages that are part of the syllabus at a given level (school year)

Vertically: in the way opportunities for the development of plurilingual repertoires are offered in curricula throughout the years of schooling

2. What the “Guide for the development and implementation of plurilingual and intercultural curricula” stands for

First of all we need to note, that curriculum refers not only to school curricula local, regional or even national, but takes a broader perspective: a curriculum is “a plan for learning” – and in line with the Rüşchlikon recommendations, this use of “Curriculum” takes life-long learning seriously.

“Curriculum” is a difficult concept to pin down, and a common agreed definition of it is still a long way off. Here, we shall use it very broadly to mean “a plan for learning”.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) insists that the school curriculum is part of a wider curriculum, a “path travelled by a learner through a sequence of educational experiences, whether under the control of an institution or not” (CEFR, chapter 8.4). It accordingly sees the “educational” curriculum as part of an “experiential” and “existential” curriculum, which starts before schooling, develops alongside it, and continues after it.

We also need to look at two other key concepts:

Definitions

Plurilingualism-Multilingualism

The concept of plurilingual competence refers to the Council of Europe's standard distinction between plurilingualism and multilingualism: plurilingualism is the ability to use more than one language – and accordingly sees languages from the standpoint of speakers and learners. Multilingualism, on the other hand, refers to the presence of several languages in a given geographical area, regardless of those who speak them.

There is an important implication for language teaching/learning:

The plurilingual approach allows for this, and reflects the current “Copernican revolution” in language teaching; it centres on learners and on developing their individual plurilingual repertoire, and not on the specific languages they are supposed to acquire.

Pluricultural and intercultural dimension

This approach would be incomplete without the pluricultural and intercultural dimension. Pluriculturality is the desire and ability to identify with several cultures, and participate in them. Interculturality is the ability to experience another culture and analyse that experience.

Pluriculturalism - identification with two (or more) social groups and their cultures – and interculturality – the competences for critical awareness of other cultures – may complement each other: active discovery of one or more other cultures may help learners to develop intercultural competence.

In other words, when we talk about *pluriculturalism* we put emphasis on attitudes, when we look at the *intercultural dimension*, we talk about abilities or competences.

The role of the “Platform of resources and references or plurilingual and intercultural education”

The platform illustrates clearly how we have moved on from a sole focus on foreign language teaching and learning towards a more integrated perspective on all the language present in our schools, the way they are – or are not – linked together, their functions and purposes in education or, to put quite simply: to account for the fact that all learning implies to use of language.

3. Challenges

Can this be put into practice? Are we not challenging traditions in language education in Europe with a very long heritage, traditions that may be there for a good reason?

Comment: integrated perspectives are not necessarily a recent phenomenon! For a long time the teaching of classical languages, and foremost Latin, served as a common determiner in terms of teaching methods and objectives – the independence of the language

of schooling and foreign language teaching is more recent than we think – but this is an aside.

After centuries dominated by the ideal that one nation = one language we seem to reconnect with a more open view of multilingualism in Europe (15th – 16th century)

But, finally, I would like to highlight three challenges:

3.1 School curricula: integration of the Ls and other languages: developing communicative competence, learning about language and building knowledge in school subjects, mediated by language

3.2 Implications for teacher training: how do we promote awareness of the language dimension in all school subjects and develop teaching practices accordingly?

3.3 How do we resolve the tension between focusing on outcome in terms of linguistic proficiency and cultural learning (a dimension the CEFR treats a little disrespectfully as “Aesthetic uses of language”), which has always been an important part of language learning?