Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education

EXECUTIVE VERSION

Document prepared for the Policy Forum 'The right of learners to quality and equity in education – The role of linguistic and intercultural competences'

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Executive summary

This text, preparation of which was decided at the Language Policy Forum held in Strasbourg in February 2007, is intended **to facilitate improved implementation of the values and principles of plurilingual and intercultural education in the teaching of all languages** - foreign, regional or minority, classical, and languages of schooling.

Plurilingual and intercultural education realises the universal right to a quality education, covering: acquisition of competences, knowledge, dispositions and attitudes, diversity of learning experiences, and construction of individual and collective cultural identities. Its aim is to make teaching more effective, and increase the contribution it makes, both to school success for the most vulnerable learners, and to social cohesion.

The ideas and proposals put forward in the text form part of the Council of Europe Language Policy Division's project, "Languages in education – languages for education", contributions to which are published on a "*Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education*"[1].

The text comprises three chapters. The first provides a general picture of the issues and principles involved in designing and/or improving curricula, and of pedagogical and didactic approaches which open the way to fuller realisation of the general aim of plurilingual and intercultural education. The next two chapters look more closely at two basic questions raised in the first: How can the specific content and aims of plurilingual and intercultural education be identified and integrated within the curriculum, while also respecting the specific content and aims of teaching individual languages? How can curriculum scenarios be used to project the spacing-out in time of this content and these objectives? Finally, several appendices provide tools and reference lists. All of this can also be supplemented by consulting the ancillary documents available on the above-mentioned platform.

The text itself says little about use of the *European Language Portfolio*, the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* or similar pedagogical instruments - but they are implicit throughout, and should be a natural concomitant of progress towards plurilingual and intercultural education.

The document circulated at the Language Policy Forum in Geneva (2-4 November 2010) is a first version, and submitted for consultation, with a view to improving and enriching its content.

Chapter 1: Curriculum, competences and plurilingual and intercultural education

The text's **vision of the curriculum** can be summed up as follows[2]:

- The school ("educational") curriculum, which organises learning, is itself part of an "experiential" and "existential" curriculum which extends beyond the school.

- Development and implementation of a curriculum cover numerous activities on various levels of the education system: international (supra), national/regional (macro), school (meso), class, teaching group or teacher (micro) or even individual (nano). These levels interact, and curriculum planning must allow for all of them.

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[1] www.coe.int/lang

[2] This vision of curriculum is based on the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and on work of the SLO (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development)

- To ensure its overall coherence, curriculum planning must cover various aspects of schooling (general aims, specific aims/competences, teaching content, approaches and activities, groupings, spatio-temporal dimensions, materials and resources, role of teachers, co-operation, assessment). Decisions on these issues are taken on many different levels, and the societal context and status of the languages concerned must be analysed closely in each case.

- To be efficient, school curricula must co-ordinate the pace of competence-acquisition in the various subjects taught, and identify transferable competences which promote (longitudinal and horizontal) coherence between them.

Plurilingual and intercultural competence is the ability to use a plural repertoire of linguistic and cultural resources to meet communication needs or interact with people from other backgrounds and contexts, and enrich that repertoire while doing so. Plurilingual competence refers to the repertoire of resources which individual learners acquire in all the languages they know or have learned, and which also relate to the cultures associated with those languages (languages of schooling, regional/minority and migration languages, modern foreign or classical languages). Intercultural competence, for its part, makes it easier to understand otherness, to make cognitive and affective connections between past and new experiences of alterity, mediate between members of two (or more) social groups and their cultures, and question the assumptions of one's own cultural group and environment.

The aims defined in a curriculum focused on acquisition of these competences must be both specific to the teaching of individual languages and their cultures, and transferable to the teaching of other subjects too. These aims are to:
- make the teaching approaches of different subjects (content, methods, terminology) more consistent with one another;
- identify bridges between subjects, and pace learning to ensure such coherence;
- highlight language components shared by the various subjects learned;
- promote awareness of possible transfers;
- link knowledge and skills for the purpose of developing intercultural competence.

The given educational context determines the relative importance – at various stages in the curriculum – of communication competences, intercultural competences, aesthetic and literary experiences, developing reflective abilities, devising strategies applicable to various subjects, promoting autonomy, and cognitive development.

Context also determines the extent to which plurilingual and intercultural education can be integrated within the curriculum. This can range from:
- working towards increased synergy between the teaching of modern and classical languages, and greater co-ordination between teachers

to

- making plurilingual and intercultural education an explicit general aim, treating all teaching of/in languages (including languages of schooling) as a single process, encouraging teachers to work closely together, and attaching equal importance to openness to languages and cultures, communication and (inter)cultural competences, learner autonomy and transversal competences.

To accommodate plurilingual and intercultural education, existing curricula may have to be modified substantially - **but without abandoning the aims of the previous curriculum**. Any initiative in one of the directions we have indicated is a positive step towards plurilingual and intercultural education.

Chapter 2: Designing curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education

This chapter gives a more detailed description of ways in which certain aspects of plurilingual and intercultural education can be gradually brought into existing curricula.

Curriculum-planning must respect a number of basic principles:

- Analysing the existing situation (particularly resources available) is an essential preliminary, if innovation is to be a "step-by-step" and not an "all-or-nothing" process;

- Once the decision-making levels involved have been identified, all the players (including national and regional authority representatives) must be informed, brought into the process and given any training they require, the aim being to create a school ethos and promote networking. Communication and co-ordination with civil society and the local community are also desirable;

- Consistency of options - within school years, throughout the different school years for each subject, and between subjects - must be aimed at.

Identifying language needs, and target competences and levels for each language activity, devising curriculum scenarios to co-ordinate courses over time, preparing syllabus documents, monitoring quality of implementation, etc. - these are all necessary stages in the process.

Analysing the socio-linguistic context and school culture is particularly important: language varieties present, perceptions of languages and plurilingualism, requirements and existing ways of meeting them, teaching traditions, verbal behaviour expected, etc.

Before specific aims are defined, thought must be given to choice of the language(s) of schooling, to which explicit general aims are assigned, to the languages taught and the order in which they are introduced, to the status of regional/minority or migration languages, and to the possible effects – some of them unintended - of those choices.

Crossover links between "languages as subjects" are the central element in plurilingual and intercultural education and depend on: specific aims defined at least partially on the basis of identical categories or comparable activities (e.g. strategies for understanding written texts, strategies for improvising non-interactive oral texts, reflective observation and analysis of linguistic phenomena); transferable intercultural competences; activities or tasks, particularly comparison activities, which involve using other languages.

The CEFR descriptors can obviously be used to define target competences in foreign languages. In the language of schooling, these will vary with levels of schooling and the needs of certain groups. In general, "levels" should be dropped in favour of "**competence profiles**", which provide a more accurate picture of learners' actual skills in their languages. A single document should be prepared in each context, laying down an integrated competence profile for all languages, while emphasising the special role of each, inter alia for intercultural competence.

This chapter sees **teaching content** in terms of the ways in which it inter-relates between subjects. Four elements are emphasised:

- **Discourse genres** are one possible link between subjects. A person's discursive repertoire comprises the genres which he/she can deploy in one or more languages, to varying degrees and for various purposes, at a given moment. The communicative profile aimed at in language teaching must include all the genres which a learner is expected to be capable of using for reception and/or production in verbal communication.

- Where **language competences** are concerned, the CEFR typology (general competences and communicative language competences) and the typology for language communication activities can together serve as a starting point. The proposals contained in the "Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education" can be added to cover literary texts and identity-building functions of languages. This typology also takes account of the language dimensions of learning strategies which are valid for various subjects.

- In **intercultural education**, the sharing of teaching content is not necessarily limited to language teaching. Such content covers knowledge, ability to understand, ability to learn/do, and critical cultural awareness (the ability to assess, critically and applying explicit criteria, the viewpoints, practices and products of a previously unknown social group, and of the social groups to which one belongs oneself).

- Another point of contact between subjects is thinking about language, the aim being to objectivise learners' intuitions regarding the ways in which languages work, and particularly to generate awareness of the ways in which **languages and discourse genres vary**, and the significance of their doing so.

The importance attached to crossover links between subjects in no way implies that the place and role of specific school subjects are being challenged. The intention is, rather, to organise them in cohesive activity groups, and even introduce new subjects (e.g. language awareness, particularly at pre-primary and primary level). Another aim is to build curricula around types of activity which promote exchange between teachers, teachers and learners, and learners - and encourage learners not to restrict themselves to certain languages.

Teacher training is crucial to doing all this. In particular, it is desirable to identify the most strategic or accessible points of contact between teachers of different subjects, as well as "points of professional interest", which can be used as a focus for interdisciplinary transfers and complementarities.

Finally, this chapter considers questions relating to assessment. **Assessment of learners' achievements** is necessary, but caution is needed in reaching conclusions. Summative or certification assessment is possible, using stringent methods - but most assessment will be formative, and emphasise self-assessment. It may be based on exercises which are aimed at a specific language, but can highlight transversal competences when similar tests are used in different languages or learners' ability to switch between languages in an appropriate manner is mobilised.

Evaluating implementation of the curriculum and its effects on teaching methods is a complex undertaking. Analysis of the results achieved must take account of factors outside the class, and the criteria applied must include the impact of holistic teaching on curriculum effectiveness, de-compartmentalisation of subjects and the emergence in schools of genuine educational communities - which obviously implies gradual change, and not "curriculum revolution".

Chapter 3: Elements for curriculum scenarios geared to plurilingual and intercultural education

Plurilingual and intercultural education depends on spreading specific aims and teaching content over the whole schooling process, thus promoting vertical and horizontal coherence. **"Curriculum scenarios" embody a prospective approach** which can be used to link general aims with curriculum features which help to realise them, and find the type of curriculum best suited to the requirements and possibilities of a given context.

One of the things to be considered here is the **experiential aspect** of any curriculum which seeks to respect the universal right to a high-quality education: for a language-learning culture to emerge, learners must experience a range of different learning modes. In other words, approaches to learning and teaching languages must both be varied. Planning for plurilingual and intercultural education must specify, not only aims and target levels, but also define the types of experience which learners must have, if they are to learn successful and in favourable conditions.

This chapter contains proposals on dividing these experiences between the various stages of the schooling process. To take just one example, it suggests that the following types of experience are suited, at pre-primary level, to the age of pupils, and the period of cognitive, affective and social development through which they are passing:

- experience of linguistic and cultural diversity, and particularly that present in the class;

- experience of listening to others, of interaction norms, etc., as part of educating pupils to respect others;

- experience of the ways in which forms of expression can vary (spatial expression in gesture and movement, first forms of oralised literacy, register variation, etc.);

- multimodal and multisensorial experiences (contact with various semiological and graphic systems, restitution of a message via another sense, gestures preparatory to writing, etc.);

- initial experience of the first foreign language and culture (counting rhymes, etc.);

- first experience of thinking about languages, human communication and cultural identities, in terms which children of that age can grasp.

Obviously, these lists, which are neither exhaustive nor ranked in order of importance, become fuller and more complex as learners advance to upper secondary level, while questions relating to assessment and expected competence profiles are answered differently on different levels.

The division of aims and content between stages in schooling and levels of teaching must respect the given context. **Four prototypical cases** are used to illustrate this principle, and outline scenarios are presented for each: introduction of the first foreign language at primary level, and a second at secondary level (the commonest pattern in Europe); language teaching at secondary vocational level; teaching of regional languages; bilingual education.

The basic scenario for the first indicates aims and methods suited to each stage in schooling, provides for gradual introduction of several languages, makes the language of schooling a part of plurilingual and intercultural education, diversifies learning methods and use of these languages, promotes reflection on variations between and within them, emphasises bridges between subjects, and takes due account of the aims of intercultural education.

For the three other cases, two types of scenario are given: the first type is primarily based on the gradual building of synergies between different language courses; the second is more broadly based on the overall dynamics of the curriculum.

All these specimen scenarios have certain common features:

- they adopt a holistic approach, in which curriculum planning covers learners' repertoire languages, languages in their environment, and languages taught in schools;

- they respect the language and cultural rights of learners, including the most vulnerable;

- they give all teaching of languages and other subjects an intercultural dimension;

- they set out to generate synergies between the teaching of various languages, with a view to coherent and efficient learning, including "partial" competences and inter–/translingual strategies;

- they allow for languages' function as a knowledge-building instrument.

Coherence does not mean, however, that approaches and methods are standardised. Target competence profiles and aims can vary greatly. Similarly, spreading the hours available over the school week is not necessarily the only temporal format. Globalisation of hours devoted to languages, modules, parallel or staggered learning of different languages, and suspension of teaching and/or changes in perspective are possible alternatives.

The chapter ends by considering **pupils from migration or underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds.** There is, in fact, a broad area where the two groups intersect, even though they must be distinguished, and are not covered by any one "prototypical case"; they are entitled, like others, to the learning experiences referred to above, and their syllabus must not be reduced, depriving them of skills, knowledge, and perspectives on the world from which other pupils benefit. Children from underprivileged backgrounds have needs which make it essential to expose them to all forms of expression, emphasise the relationship between variations and norms, and focus on diversity of language systems and of the rules which govern their social uses.

Children with migrant backgrounds are not, for their part, a homogeneous group; indeed, they exemplify the increasing heterogeneity of school populations. Nonetheless, it should be noted that: their home languages are a resource which schools can turn to good account in educating all pupils, and not simply a barrier to success for children who speak them; the life and career plans of children in this category cannot be prejudged; and schools must also ensure that the price of integrating them within the host country's school system and community is not sudden, total severance from their first environment.