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*Plurilingual and intercultural education as a project*

Curriculum scenarios for plurilingual and intercultural education

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## Curriculum scenarios for plurilingual and intercultural education

The purpose of plurilingual and intercultural education is to create individuals with plurilingual and intercultural competences. This paper describes scenarios in which individuals' potential for such competences can be developed, it being understood that the outcomes will vary from one person to another.

As with any education project, plurilingual and intercultural education needs to be put into context: not all methods of approach and possible language configurations are suitable for every situation. In each case, it is important to identify the easiest point(s) of entry, that provide a pathway based on what is already there, and eventually leading to a more detailed and complex plurilingual and intercultural education project. With the help of outline curriculum scenarios, this paper sketches out a few examples of methods of approach in plurilingual and intercultural education and suggests possible ways in which some of its components could be arranged.

### **Contents**

1. Languages spoken in school but not taught .....	4
1.1 For regional, minority and migration languages.....	4
1.2. For “youth languages” or non-standard varieties .....	4
2. The language of schooling as the only language taught at school .....	5
3. The first foreign language taught in connection with learning other languages at school .....	6
Conclusion .....	7

To demonstrate how it is possible to implement plurilingual and intercultural education or, at least, to start working towards this, a few outline scenarios will be presented which focus on certain components of plurilingual and intercultural education and propose a few simple combinations thereof. The list of components includes the language of schooling which, as a subject, is taught alongside foreign or classical languages but also learners' repertoire languages (regional, minority or migration languages) and languages and varieties found in other disciplines (see [Plurilingual and intercultural education as a project](#), chapter 3).

Three scenarios have been chosen which refer to a variety of situations discussed separately here, but which may co-exist within the same school. In some ways, these three configurations pose different challenges for plurilingual and intercultural education. These challenges are examined in terms of questions, to which a few answers will be given purely by way of example.

## **1. Languages spoken in school but not taught**

These are languages which form part of the pupils' repertoire but which are not included in the school curriculum. Such situations are very common and can occur in a wide range of circumstances. Often, these languages have a different status in relation to the language of schooling and each other. They include: regional languages, minority languages, migration languages and, in the case of young people from underprivileged backgrounds, variations of the language of schooling that are seen as having little or no legitimacy. In any event, these are complex situations in which the school needs to act so that this "difference", or heterogeneity, becomes a help and not a hindrance for learners.

The challenge facing schools is as follows: how to recognise and capitalise on (the existence of) these languages?

### **1.1 For regional, minority and migration languages**

There are many ways to recognise and capitalise on these languages.

- An all-embracing language learning approach which builds on and uses this individual potential as a starting point for all language teaching and which, by introducing it, through the appropriate teaching methods (see below), as something worth investigating, transforms it into a recognised and valuable resource for the class as a whole.
- Teaching the language of schooling and foreign languages in a way that makes room for these languages and uses them at least for the purposes of comparison.
- Classroom exercises to familiarise all learners with these languages through informal, limited and "reciprocal" learning.
- Occasional but repeated reminders and use.
- Asking adult speakers of these languages to share their experiences of the cultures that they convey.
- Reading texts on these languages to learn about their origins, "history" and development.
- Language and culture awareness methods or intercomprehension strategies.
- Schools encouraging families to carry on using the language in question at home.
- Provision of opportunities to study these languages either within the curriculum – as an optional subject - or through extracurricular classes (run, for example, by social groups belonging to the relevant community) that are also open to other learners.

### **1.2. For "youth languages" or non-standard varieties**

Young people sometimes speak to each other using non-standard varieties of the national language or the language of schooling, in some cases demonstrating considerable creativity and remarkable skill in using certain rhetorical devices. These varieties, which are not considered by schools to be "proper" languages, are sometimes specific to certain groups in

which they may, for example, function as a cryptic code unfamiliar to adults, parents and teachers, expressing an oppositional identity in relation to the school, which uses “another language”. In the case of pupils from underprivileged backgrounds, it is often the language that is spoken in their family and social group.

There are various complementary approaches to dealing with these non-standard varieties in the context of plurilingual and intercultural education.

- Non-stigmatisation of the language varieties spoken by the learner: the teacher must adopt a certain mindset or ethical stance so as not to act in a manner detrimental to the learner based on first appearances, let alone their personal and social identity.
- Activities to raise awareness about what characterises these ways of speaking, which deserve to be treated as objects of study and observation too, and not simply reduced to languages spoken by the “poor”. In the case of the language spoken in the French *banlieues*, for example, “at secondary schools, the best thing to do is to make it work as a language for those who speak it, to show them the linguistic process they bring to bear on French when they speak the language, to make them aware of their love of aphesis, to get them to analyse the metaphors, metonyms and anacolutha that they juggle in their language every day [...]” (Encrevé P. and Braudeau M. (2007), *Conversations sur la langue française*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 102).
- Linguistic education which, while welcoming these youth languages, is nevertheless primarily concerned to expand, diversify and enrich the repertoire of these learners through other varieties of the standard language, including, of course, the language of schooling (language as a subject and languages of other subjects) and foreign languages. These are rights to which these learners are entitled, and which schools have an obligation to respect (see [Plurilingual and intercultural education as a right](#)).
- The conscious use of the language in other subjects, which contributes to the enrichment and diversification of repertoires by developing proficiency in the discourse and textual genres that are frequently used.
- Other disciplines that, with their own content and especially their own “cultures”, draw learners into communities of practices in which their personality itself may be enriched by the opportunity to embrace new identities (historian, mathematician, physicist, etc.) and, at the same time and in their own way, pave the way for the development of intercultural competence through the construction of a multi-perspective and diverse view of the reality that these disciplines involve.

#### Reference documents

- Byram M. (2009), [Multicultural societies, pluricultural people and the project of intercultural education](#)
- Byram M. (2006), [Languages and identities](#), Council of Europe, Language Policy Division, Strasbourg.

## 2. The language of schooling as the only language taught at school

This scenario is somewhat contradictory as it is rare, in Europe at any rate, for education systems not to teach at least one foreign language. By isolating it, however, this configuration highlights the central role that the language of schooling can play in a plurilingual and intercultural education project.

Schools must ask themselves: how can we endeavour to provide a plurilingual and intercultural education if the only language taught at school is the language of schooling? Or,

to reframe the question, what unique and specific contribution could a language of schooling make to plurilingual and intercultural education? In what way can it make pupils aware of the diversity and plurality of languages?

This can be achieved through various measures, which are always complementary and not mutually exclusive.

- Embracing the linguistic diversity found among pupils, including the language of schooling (see 1.1).
- Teaching the language of schooling using an approach that is more descriptive than prescriptive, making it possible to highlight and build on variation in all its dimensions and in its functioning, because diversity is a feature of any language, however standardised it may be (see [Plurilingual and intercultural education as a right](#), paragraph 1.2).
- Teaching a language in a way that sensitises pupils to the plurality of norms affecting pronunciation and accent, in addition to other language aspects such as lexical choice, morphosyntax, the use of specialist language, etc. This plurality of norms is conditioned by changes in communication parameters; a sound grasp of these norms is something to which learners are entitled, and which is necessary if they are to be fully integrated in school, society and the workplace (see [Plurilingual and intercultural education as a right](#)).
- Considering, reviewing and critically analysing the languages created and used by the media (for example, the language used by the press, on television and on the radio, the language used in text messages and blogs).
- Introducing the world of literature and poetry, including literary and poetic expressions that use a non-standard variety. Schools have a specific responsibility to help pupils explore these works and to introduce them to the aesthetic dimension of language and its works of art.
- Starting with the language of schooling and looking at other varieties/languages, which may or may not belong to the same linguistic group, through plural and partial approaches that raise awareness of linguistic diversity (becoming aware of languages and cultures), or use the language of schooling as a bridge towards other languages in the same or other families (intercomprehension).
- Acquiring, through the language of schooling, specific languages and other semiotic codes which are characteristic of different subjects; this is a way of expanding and diversifying learners' repertoires, without which access to different disciplines would not be possible.
- Drawing on all school subjects, as suggested in the [Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe](#),<sup>1</sup> thereby helping to highlight the diversity and plurality of languages and cultures and their contributions to various disciplines.

All these measures can, of course, also be applied to the language of schooling in other outline scenarios, although some may be adapted differently in the interplay between the different languages, present and/or taught.

### **3. The first foreign language taught in relation to learning other languages at school**

In this scenario, the emphasis is on the relationship between the first foreign language and either the language of schooling or other foreign languages taught at a later stage.

Schools must ask themselves: what is the function of the first foreign language in relation to the other languages taught at school?

- Learning the first foreign language has a major influence on the development of metalinguistic reflection and on awareness raising with respect to the language of

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<sup>1</sup> Beacco J.C. and Byram M (2007), Council of Europe, Language Policy Division

schooling, through the indirect routes and the creation of critical distance that it involves for the learner. This occurs if these aspects are acknowledged by the teacher and if the two languages are not taught in isolation from one another.

- The teacher of this first foreign language is responsible for the switching from the first language, often acquired through informal education, to another language that is more or less unfamiliar to the learner. The teacher establishes skills, knowledge, attitudes, strategies, tasks, etc. that will act as points of reference and markers for future learning, all the while drawing on the first language of schooling for support.
- Integrated learning between the language of schooling and the first foreign language requires, depending on the degree of integration, either reciprocal information, or one-off collaboration, or ongoing co-operation on projects or part of the respective curricula. It affords an opportunity to build bridges between the two languages and highlights the similarities and differences between them.
- Foreign language teachers can also work together through constant reminders and systematic transfer exercises. They can also work with the language of schooling teacher with a view to co-ordination, but without aiming for complete harmonisation or homogenisation, which would have a dumbing-down effect. Integrated language teaching and transfer exercises would thus aim to produce cognitive efficiency, reinforcement of the knowledge gained, increased speed in future language learning, a willingness to take risks on the part of the learners and a certain degree of teaching efficiency for the teachers.
- A positive attitude to other languages can be fostered by exploring the contributions of all the other languages in the first foreign language (but also in the language of schooling), not forgetting that the language awareness-raising and intercomprehension activities already mentioned could be used here by all language teachers.
- It would be most helpful if all language teachers (of the language of schooling or of foreign languages) could receive initial and in-service training to become "plurilingualism experts".

With regard to the particular case of English, plurilingual and intercultural education, as conceived here, can also be achieved in the following ways.

- Teaching that shows, for example, the internal plurality of this "hypercentral" language (Calvet L.-J. (1999): *Pour une écologie des langues du monde*, Paris, Plon); this could be done by highlighting the existence of different English varieties (British, Australian, American, Indian, etc.), in addition to numerous regional varieties (including in countries where it is the *de jure* or *de facto* official language. See, for example, the difficulty of recognising Ebonics in the United States).
- Raising awareness of the various cultures that this language expresses, thus contributing to the development of intercultural skills: these first two approaches also apply, of course, to other "supercentral" languages (ibid.), for example, French, Spanish and Portuguese.
- Discovering the difference that exists between "international English", which is often used as a lingua franca, an important and functional communication tool, and English as a language of specific countries and an expression of their cultures.
- Reflecting on the current - very special - status of this language and on the reasons for its popularity and prestige, by comparing it to the similar status enjoyed by other languages in the past.
- Using its role as a bridge language between Romance and Germanic languages, where appropriate.

## Conclusion

It should be clear from these few suggestions for possible teaching approaches to plurilingual and intercultural education that such education is not an unattainable ideal when it comes to shaping the personality of each individual as a person and as a future European citizen. Plurilingual and intercultural education places the learner at the centre of its quest for solutions, as they really are, not only with their strengths and weaknesses but also with their

rights to develop language competences. Rights which schools have to respect and which will make the learners capable of independently constructing their own single yet plural identity, working and communicating in an ever more complex society and, quite simply, living the best life possible.

Plurilingual and intercultural education also offers an opportunity to tackle, here and now, the practical difficulties of any situation and the challenges posed by the modern world. A wide range of tried and tested solutions already exists, while others are still being trialled and will be available soon to those wishing to gear education systems more strongly towards plurilingual and intercultural education.

The curriculum scenarios approach briefly outlined here could, therefore, make it possible to consider gradually introducing large-scale projects adapted to different situations and new societal needs.

#### **Reference documents**

For the concept of scenario see:

- [\*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment\*](#), Council of Europe/Editions Didier, 2001 (First edition: 1996), chap. 8, *Linguistic diversification for curriculum design*. [www.coe.int/lang-CEFR](http://www.coe.int/lang-CEFR)
- Coste D. (ed.), Cavalli M., Crişan A and Ven P.-H., van de (2007): [\*A European reference document for languages of education\*](#), paragraph 3.4.2. Curriculum scenarios and plurilingual education. Language Policy Division, Strasbourg