The linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds

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Die Integration von Migranten und Migrantinnen in den Aufnahmeländern, ist für den sozialen Zusammenhalt von fundamentaler Bedeutung und daher ein zentrales Anliegen des Europarats. Das Europaratsprojekt „Languages in/for Education" will einen Beitrag zu diesem sozialen Zusammenhalt und zum interkulturellen Dialog leisten, indem es mehrsprachige und interkulturelle Ausbildung fördert und fordert. Ein besonders wichtiges Anliegen ist die Entwicklung von praktischer Sprachkompetenz in der Schulsprache und von konkreten Hilfestellungen für diejenigen, denen die Schulsprache Schwierigkeiten bereitet. Eine der Expertengruppen des Projekts konzentriert sich hier auf die sprachliche und schulische Integration und von Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Migrationshintergrund. Der Autor des Beitrags erstellte in Konsultation mit einer grossen Anzahl von Expertinnen und Experten der Mitgliedsstaaten des Europarats ein Konzeptpapier, das im Rahmen einer Konferenz der Vertreter der Regierungen der Mitgliedstaaten in Genf im November 2010 zusammen mit sechs Begleitstudien vorgestellt wurde.

Integration: a human rights perspective

In a Europe of increasing linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity, the successful integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds is among the greatest challenges faced by educational systems. It is also a matter of great importance to the Council of Europe. Founded to defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Council is concerned to promote social inclusion, social cohesion and respect for diversity. Its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue defines social cohesion as 'the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation', and integration as a two-way process that depends on 'the capacity of people to live together with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life' (Council of Europe 2008: 10). The achievement of integration in this multi-faceted sense clearly depends on the active involvement of all sectors of society; it also places a heavy burden of responsibility on schools.

The Council of Europe's 'Languages in/for Education' (LE) project was launched in 2006 as part of the follow-up to the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Warsaw in May 2005. The project's goal is to contribute to social cohesion and intercultural dialogue by promoting what it calls 'plurilingual and intercultural education'. It is particularly concerned to foster the development of effective competences and skills in the language(s) of schooling and is committed to addressing the needs of those for whom the language of schooling poses problems, whether for reasons of social or economic disadvantage or because it is not the language they use at home. One of the expert groups established by the LE project is concerned with the linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds. At the intergovernmental conference held in Geneva in November 2010 the project launched a concept paper written by myself in consultation with a large number of experts from different Council of Europe member states, together with six supporting studies. This article summarises the concept paper and introduces the supporting studies.

The concept paper
Council of Europe policy
The first section of the concept paper outlines Council of Europe policy as it concerns children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds, emphasising its basis in human rights and its insistence on the importance of intercultural dialogue. When applied to schooling, this policy yields the concept of 'plurilingual and intercultural education', according to which all languages present in the school are valued regardless of their social status and have an active role to play in the provision of quality education for all pupils. 'All languages present in the school' means: the language of schooling, both as the medium of curriculum teaching and learning and as a subject in its own right; regional and minority languages, including the home languages of

migrant pupils, which may or may not be curriculum subjects and/or the medium of curriculum learning; and foreign languages, ancient as well as modern, which are taught as school subjects but may also be the medium of curriculum learning, as in CLIL projects.

The need for plurilingual and intercultural education arises from the linguistic rights of the individual, but also from the value attached to linguistic diversity and thus to multilingualism as one of the positive characteristics of European societies. Everyone has the potential to be plurilingual because plurilingual competence is a consequence of our inbuilt language capacity; and education should seek to ensure the harmonious development of the individual's plurilingual competence in the same way as it seeks to foster the development of his or her other abilities. The development of plurilingual and intercultural competence within a multilingual and multicultural educational framework is one of the foundations of democratic co-existence. It plays an essential role in the management of diversity and allows every citizen in Europe to participate effectively in the national and transnational public arena.

The linguistic situation and language needs of migrant pupils

The second section of the concept paper begins by arguing that policies calculated to promote the linguistic and educational integration of migrant pupils, whether they are new arrivals or settled, must take account of the multiplicity of migrants' linguistic, cultural and educational experience. It must also recognise that the out-of-school linguistic experience of migrant pupils is infinitely variable. At one extreme, a migrant family may live linguistically and culturally apart, remote from other members of its original speech community; at the other extreme, it may live in close proximity to many other families from the same country, as part of a cohesive linguistic, cultural, economic and religious community. Policy should also acknowledge that speaking another language outside

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school does not necessarily imply a negative attitude to education and integration or rejection of the language of schooling.

Two arguments are usually advanced in favour of developing migrant learners' literacy skills in their home language. According to the first argument, it is a fundamental human right to use one's 'own' language, and without literacy skills the use of any language can only ever be partial. The second argument centres on the so-called 'interdependence hypothesis', which claims that 'although the surface aspects (e.g. pronunciation, fluency, etc.) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying conceptual proficiency or knowledge base that is common across languages' (Cummins 2008). In other words, if migrant pupils develop literacy in their home language, that will support their acquisition of literacy in the language of schooling. The concept paper (Little 2010: 23, note 36) cites a project currently in progress in Belgium (Gent) which is teaching children of Turkish origin to read in Turkish before they are taught to read in Dutch. Teachers have reported that some children begin to transfer their reading skills from Turkish to Dutch before they have been formally introduced to reading in Dutch. There are many circumstances, of course, in which it is not feasible to provide this kind of support. But then it is necessary to seek alternative means to develop and exploit migrant learners' proficiency in their home language. Another Belgian project is training teachers to support 'functional plurilingual learning', in which migrant pupils use their home language when performing collaborative tasks with other speakers of the same language, even when the teacher has no

knowledge of the language (see Little 2010: 25).

Whatever arrangements may or may not be made to exploit their proficiency and develop their literacy skills in their home language, it is widely recognised that although migrant pupils may be 'motivated learners and have positive attitudes towards school … [they] often perform at levels significantly lower than their native peers' (OECD 2006: 8). When poor performance at school is language-related, it is attributable above all to difficulties in mastering academic language – the terminology and forms of discourse characteristic of different curriculum subjects. Research has found it useful to distinguish between conversational and academic language. Conversational language is context-embedded: comprehension and production of meaning are supported by paralinguistic cues (intonation, gesture, eye contact, feedback, etc.) and by features of the physical situation (persons and objects in focus, the sunshine that is pleasantly warm, the rain that is making you wet, etc.). The language used to mediate and process curriculum content, on the other hand, tends to be context-reduced: cues to meaning are primarily linguistic, contained in the spoken or written text we seek to understand or produce. According to the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, there is a need for 'an education system which generates capacities for critical thinking and innovation' (Council of Europe 2008: 24). Such a system should be designed to give all pupils access to academic language, on which critical thinking and innovation depend.

Two Council of Europe tools

The third part of the concept paper introduces two Council of Europe tools that have been used to support the

linguistic integration of newly arrived immigrant pupils who have little or no proficiency in the language of schooling. The first is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001), which provides us with the means to describe language learning outcomes in terms of language use at six proficiency levels, with reference to language activities and linguistic and strategic competences. The second tool is the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which was conceived as a companion piece to the CEFR and aims to support the development of learner autonomy, intercultural awareness and plurilingualism.

In Ireland all pupils whose home language is neither English nor Irish are provided with two years of English language support delivered on a withdrawal basis. That is, they are assigned to a mainstream class appropriate to their age and provided with special English language classes apart from their mainstream class. This typically means one special class each day in primary schools and several special classes each week in post-primary schools. English language support is framed by English Language Proficiency Benchmarks, age-appropriate and domain-specific adaptations of the first three levels of the CEFR (IILT 2003a, 2003b). Versions of the ELP (IILT 2004a, 2004b) support pupils' progress through the Benchmarks, making them explicitly aware of their linguistic and cultural identity and helping them to manage their own learning; while assessment kits based on the Benchmarks allow schools to monitor pupils'/students' progress. Empirical research (Ćatibušić 2011) has recently confirmed the robustness of the primary Benchmarks and added much linguistic detail to the description of the learning trajectory that migrant pupils must follow in order to become fully integrated members of the educational mainstream.

Adopting the same approach as the English Language Proficiency Benchmarks, the *Curriculum Framework for Romani* (CFR) was developed as part of the Council of Europe's comprehensive approach to Roma and Traveller issues. Designed to support the formal teaching of Romani in a wide range of educational contexts, it is based on the first four proficiency levels of the CEFR and is organised according to themes, situations and contexts relevant to Roma society and culture. It is accompanied by two adaptations of the ELP, for learners aged 6–11 and 11–16. The CFR was piloted in Sweden and the Czech Republic and is currently the focus of a support activity of the ECML involving Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Serbia, and the Slovak Republic. The CFR and the two ELPs are available at www.coe.int/lang → MINORITIES AND MIGRANTS → ROMANI → SEMINAR 2008.

The third part of the concept paper concludes by briefly referring to some other frameworks that have been developed to support the linguistic and educational integration of migrant pupils. In Australia the state of Victoria has developed Essential Learning Standards that define the competences to be achieved in the course of compulsory education and an English as a Second Language Companion that focuses on the needs of learners for whom English is not a home language; while the state of Queensland has elaborated band scales for reading, writing, speaking and listening to guide the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. In the United States, TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) has published ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 (the grades of compulsory education); and in the United Kingdom, NALDIC (the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum) has developed descriptors for use in the formative assessment of primary pupils from migrant backgrounds. In Canada the Ontario Ministry of Education is currently developing Steps to English Proficiency (STEP), a tool for monitoring and assessing pupils for whom English is not a home language.

Supporting studies

The integration of migrant pupils is most likely to succeed when it is underpinned by a language education policy that respects the reciprocity of the integration process and is explicitly associated with non-educational aspects of integration policy. The principle that integration is a reciprocal process clearly has consequences for individuals at all institutional and community levels: pupils and teachers in classrooms; pupils and their parents, teaching and non-teaching staff; principals and other managers at the level of the school; and staff of all kinds in community organisations and in local, regional and national institutions. Accordingly, the Council of Europe has published a series of supporting studies that seek to take account of these levels.

Effective language support depends on efficient diagnosis of migrant pupils' proficiency in the language(s) of schooling and their home language(s). Diagnosis is essential when pupils first enter school and at points of transition from one stage of education to the next; it may also be appropriate at other times, e.g. at the end of each school year. Language diagnostics in multilingual settings, by Drorit Lengyel, summarises the principles that underlie diagnostics in language education, describes some of the available approaches, and explains how they can be implemented. Some of the tools described can be used to explore pupils' competence in their home language(s).

The concept paper insists that educational success depends on mastery of the varieties of academic language that constitute the fabric of the different curriculum subjects. Research has shown that as well as migrants, pupils from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to find this challenge difficult to overcome. Because knowledge is virtually inseparable from the language that embodies it, all teachers should be language teachers in the sense that they are sensitive to the language of their subject(s) and explicitly help their learners to master it. *Languages of schooling: focusing on vulnerable learners*, by Eike Thürmann, Helmut Vollmer and Irene Pieper, elaborates on this theme. When migrant children and adolescents arrive in

Pierre Alechinsky, Plongée, 2001.

their host country knowing nothing of the language of schooling, they must simultaneously master conversational and academic varieties of the language. Second and third-generation migrants, however, typically face a different challenge: they may be conversationally fluent in the language of schooling, but their mastery of literacy in the standard language may be impeded by the presence of deviant forms in their idiolect. Marie-Madeleine Bertucci's study, *Migrant pupils and formal mastery of the language of schooling*, illuminates this problem with reference to the written French produced by such learners.

The Council of Europe views the plurilingualism of individuals and the multilingualism of societies as positive assets. Accordingly, the LE project believes that it is the responsibility of educational systems to help pupils realise their plurilingual potential along with their other potentials. *Capitalising on, activating and developing plurilingual and pluricultural repertoires*, by Véronique Castellotti and Danièle Moore, focuses on ways of acknowledging, developing and exploiting migrant pupils' plurilingual repertoires and provides links to resources developed in a number of countries and languages.

If all children and adolescents of school-going age have a right to quality education, teachers, principals and other school staff have a right to quality formation. Pre- and in-service teacher education needs to equip teachers to cope with multilingual/multicultural classrooms and become efficient agents for developing the language of schooling; and systems of continuing professional development for principals and other school staff need to provide information that helps them to perform their roles in an appropriately supportive way. *Professional development for staff working in multilingual schools*, by James Anderson, Christine Hélot, Vicky Obied and Joanna McPake, provides a comprehensive overview of available resources.

Finally, successful linguistic and educational integration depends on cooperation between pupils, their parents, teachers and other school staff, effective leadership and efficient management within the school, and the establishment of fruitful links with the community to which the school belongs. *Co-operation, management and networking*, by Christiane Bainski, Tanja Kaseric, Ute Michel, Joanna McPake and Amy Thompson, is concerned with the structures and procedures that shape cooperation, management and networking, providing an overview of these dimensions and a large number of links to online resources.

The concept paper and the six supporting studies are all available in English and French on the website of the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division: www.coe.int/lang → NEWS: INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM → DOCUMENTS: LIST OF TEXTS FOR DOWNLOADING.

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