Language competences in “non-linguistic” subjects and success at school

“Intercultural Education Strategy- One Year On”

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http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/
Council of Europe values and principles

human rights, pluralist democracy, rule of law

conventions: European standards - education § language

Right to education (ECHR)

recommendations: consensus on agreed principles

reference instruments: guidance in implementing principles

co-operation programmes - 47 member states

‘The right of learners to quality and equity in education - the role of linguistic and intercultural competences’ (Intergovernmental Policy Forum 2010)

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Conference_EN.asp
The entitlement to quality education implies that learners should be enabled to exercise their right to full and equal access to the curriculum at each stage of schooling.

The language of schooling is a fundamental transversal element of schooling, in acquiring and building knowledge in all subjects.

The language competences required by the curriculum need to be made explicit for learners as well as teachers.

These competences do not develop automatically by themselves and require particular attention in the classroom.

ALL learners have an entitlement to quality learning opportunities and targeted support in extending their discursive repertoire.

Disadvantaged learners need specific forms of support to extend their repertoire for school success.

The home language of children from migrant backgrounds plays an important role.

All languages are valued in a plurilingual and intercultural education perspective.
Plurality and transversality of language education

‘Languages in education, languages for education’

- each learner’s own evolving language repertoire
- the language of schooling as a subject and medium of instruction in other subjects
- other official languages
- minority, regional, migrant languages
- foreign languages
- classical languages
The learner and the languages present in school

LANGUAGE(S) OF SCHOOLING

- Regional, minority and migration languages
- Foreign languages – modern and classical

Language as a subject

Language(s) in other subjects

Reflections on the use of descriptors in learning, teaching and assessment
Plurilingual and Intercultural Education (PIE)

‘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 the repertoire while doing so.’ (Guide for the Development and Implementation of Curricula for PIE, CoE)

- extending the repertoire of resources which individual learners acquire in the languages they know or have learned, and which also relate to the cultures associated with those languages
intercultural competences (‘linguistic goodwill’; critical cultural awareness..)

- mastering a variety of forms of discourse genres and texts (spoken/written) in their home language, the language(s) of schooling, other languages according to their needs and capacities

- raising awareness of transversal elements in developing competences; knowledge and (meta)skills are transferred in learning and communication processes (discourse genres, language awareness, thinking about language, strategies...)
  - across different languages
  - between language as subject and language in other subjects
Language(s) of schooling as subject (LS)

language, literature and socio-cultural context of language use
- literary analysis and appreciation; media..
- discourse genres (oral § written)
  (spoken/written texts with conventions - structural, textual and language patterns)
- knowledge about language; awareness/reflection
- critical thinking; aesthetic sense, sensitivity to cultural expression..
- identity building; national culture and values

‘functional’ subject aims and *Bildung*
‘a process of developing and bringing out the full potential of a human being, based on each student’s resources, but stimulated and structured by education’

LS has a transversal impact on use of language in other subjects
- establishes a basis for ‘genre competence’
- supports learning of other subjects - and other languages
Language of schooling in other subjects

‘Schooling is primarily a linguistic process’ (Schleppegrell, 2004)

Language is used for knowledge building in ALL subjects

‘Subjects with a non-linguistic content’ (Vollmer) are dependent on specific language competences for knowledge building, demonstrating knowledge...

All subjects require the use of discourse competences, both common to the curriculum and subject-specific, and all offer opportunities for extending the learner’s discursive repertoire

e.g. read or write / deliver expository texts which may be different in structure depending on the subject/domain-specific content
- present the results of a scientific experiment
- understand the teacher’s explanation of a complex problem in maths
- imagine a letter from a participant in a major historical event...

exploring, naming, describing; narrating, reporting, arguing; explaining; evaluating...

describing: summarising, defining, specifying (details)
Learners have a right to develop and extend their discourse repertoires - to acquire the forms of discourse the curriculum expects them to master for successful progression from one stage to the next i.e. the discourse genres and text types and forms of language (grammar and vocabulary) that are common to each curriculum stage, and the particular forms that occur in specific school subjects or disciplinary domains

“The school’s role is to widen the range of discourse genres to which learners have access,...their discursive repertoire .... scientific subjects offer them the opportunity to experience discourse genres which are not part of their repertoire, to understand their workings and to appropriate some of them (reception or production)” (Beacco et al, CoE 2010)
“Knowledge building at school may also be seen as a complex intertextual process in which it is the role of teaching to serve as guide.

- from collective knowledge building (in interaction with peers or the teacher) to individual appropriation of knowledge, hence with the ability to feed back and reproduce that knowledge in a coherent textual form;

- from oral forms (with frequent rephrasing) to written forms, from which the hesitations and successive approximations have been removed, via provisional, exploratory written forms (rough drafts, notes, outlines etc);

- from reception/comprehension to production (model-based teaching);

- from “spontaneous”, improvised texts in ordinary communication to texts conforming to explicitly defined conventions based partly on the nature of each school subject, via a stage of reproduction/reprocessing/reformulation;

- from personal accounts of experience to texts (e.g. reports or problem-solving) of a scientific nature;
- from textual forms used for learning to those used to assess learners (mainly written forms).”

Language and school subjects - linguistic dimensions of knowledge building in school curricula (Beacco et al, CoE 2010)
‘Academic’ language of schooling

*BICS / CALP (Cummins)*
Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
- conversational and academic language proficiency

social conversational language is
- embedded in context
- supported by cues such as facial expressions, gestures, intonation, objects etc

academic language tends to be
- more abstract, complex, condensed
- context-reduced,
- less extra-linguistic support
- more formal, structured

essential for school success and active, critical citizenship
Implications for disadvantaged learners

*Languages of schooling: focusing on vulnerable groups* (Thurmann, Vollmer, Pieper, CoE 2010)

*The linguistic and educational integration of children and adolescents from migrant backgrounds* (Little, CoE 2010) Concept Paper § accompanying studies

The prior social and linguistic experiences of disadvantaged students outside school may not provide them with the necessary forms of discourse.

The academic language required needs to be made explicit and learners need to be made aware of and shown how to develop new ways of thinking, the discourse genres and language forms needed to build and demonstrate knowledge.

Full and equal access to the curriculum for all students, including those from migrant backgrounds, can be facilitated by regular instructional support in this process e.g.

- scaffolding of content and language learning

‘the provision of instructional supports that enable the learner to carry out tasks and perform academically at a higher level than they would be capable of without these supports’ (Cummins, CoE 2011)

e.g. visuals, gesture, cues, pre-reading/listening activities, outline of discourse structure, explanation of vocabulary, grammar.....
- raising awareness of and encouraging transfer strategies i.e. linking and transferring cognitive-linguistic competences across different subjects/domains; transfer of learning strategies

“..transfer competence has to be seen as an important educational goal in itself - across the whole curriculum” (Thurmann, Vollmer, Pieper, CoE, 2010)

Students from migrant backgrounds can transfer competences and learning strategies between their home language and language of schooling

- facilitating access to reading: research indicates a strong relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement among 15 year old students - (Cummins.. PISA)
Validating the home language of children from migrant backgrounds

- show that home languages and cultures are valued
- seek ways of validating home language proficiency of migrant children as a cognitive resource and tool for learning
- develop instructional strategies that affirm students’ identity (Cummins, OECD) e.g.
  - language awareness activities focusing on similarities and differences across languages
    - collaborative tasks/brainstorming in groups (“functional plurilingual learning”)
    - writing in their home language as a stepping stone to writing in L2
    - learning to write simultaneously in both languages
    - internet research in their home language
    - writing and web publication of dual language books
    - class projects that encourage use of both home language and L2

Home language literacy is a right (international conventions) and a benefit for society

*Putting the evidence back into evidence-based policies for underachieving students* (Cummins, CoE 2010)
*Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for PIE* (CoE 2010)
Diagnosing language needs

- identify the individual learner’s level of language proficiency and performance in relation to the requirements of academic language at regular intervals
- not only what they can do now but also what they are in the process of learning to do as an integral part of pedagogy
- ‘assessment for learning’ (Lengyel, CoE 2010)
- involve learners in reflecting on their progress and planning their learning

For examples of assessment approaches and tools:
*Language diagnostics in multilingual settings with respect to continuous assessment procedures as accompaniment of individualised learning and teaching* (Lengyl, CoE 2010)

- establish clear learning objectives linking general curriculum standards with the second language syllabus so as to make second language progression visible for the teachers of language as subject and teachers of other subjects

*Framework of Reference for Early Second language Acquisition* (Nederlandse Taalunie - CoE)
Council of Europe ‘protocols’

Which genres (and linguistic forms) to make explicit and teach for which purposes in which subject areas at what points? How to develop them in a coordinated way across the curriculum? (Thurmann, Vollmer, Pieper)

CoE is elaborating guidelines or Protocols (not descriptors) to support curriculum developers and educational researchers in identifying the linguistic dimensions of knowledge building in school curricula:
- history; sciences; maths; literature
- a “common procedure”, relevant in principle whatever the language of instruction is; this could be the learners’ home language or an additional language acquired to a standard of proficiency of at least B2 level in the CEFR (with necessary adaptations)
inventory and description of

(i) the **educational values** targeted by history/science/maths/literature teaching

(ii) the **social situations of communication** involving history/science etc in the learners’ social environment

(iii) expected historical/scientific etc. **subject-related knowledge and competences**

(iv) existing in-school/classroom communication situations for the acquisition and construction of subject knowledge and procedures

(v) the **specific linguistic, discursive and semiotic characteristics** of relevance to the types of discourse involved in history/science etc. teaching and learning practices

-these merit being taught in their own right in each specific subject area
In summary:

- making explicit and supporting the language competences, learning experiences and forms of assessment that learners are entitled to for success in school

- encouraging and supporting them in extending their individual repertoires for success in school and in life

- promoting a whole-school policy in the spirit of an integrated plurilingual and intercultural education perspective that ensures respect for diversity

facilitates their entitlement to quality education and thereby contributes to personal development; creative expression; culture and values; socialisation; identity building; critical capacities; autonomous learning and thinking.