

Languages for Europe Think Tank – 31 January 2008

Language Education Policy Profiles

Introduction

Following our June meeting, the British Council has continued discussions with the Council of Europe about (a) a **transversal study** of the Language Education Policy Profiles produced to date (with the aim of drawing out key messages to share with other countries and feeding them in to policy debates and - where possible – encouraging appropriate action) and (b) a possible **meeting in Riga** early in 2008 with representatives of countries involved in Profiles (e.g. Poland, Norway, Lithuania and Estonia) or potentially interested (e.g. Finland, Sweden, Latvia) and leaders of Council of Europe profile groups. The aim would be to discuss

- a draft of the transnational study;
- how to encourage other countries to be involved;
- how the current project on languages of schooling can be included more thoroughly in future profiles;
- other possible developments such as follow up studies.

Members are invited to read the latest draft of the transversal study and to think about

- what kinds of follow up might be useful in their countries and
- what issues need to be followed up and by whom.

Task for our January meeting

Think Tank members are invited to advise the British Council and the Council of Europe on how best to take forward this initiative and to comment on issues such as:

1. what are the key issues arising from these studies? Which are worth following up?
2. how can stakeholders within a country best follow up a Profile?
3. what might be useful ways of using a transversal study?
4. how might individuals and organizations usefully contribute to a transversal study and how they might use the outputs.

TOB / TB

15.01.08

Language Education Policy Profiles

A transversal analysis

1. Introduction

'Language Education Policy Profiles' are an activity of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe which provides member States with an opportunity to analyse their current (and past) policy and practice and to formulate possible future developments.

The activity was first conceived and launched in the period 2002-03 when a set of Guidelines (Appendix 1) was written and a pilot Profile carried out in Hungary. Since then, Profiles have been instigated in ___ member States, ___ Regions of member States, and ___ city. Completed Profiles exist for ___ member States, ___ Regions, and ___ city/ies, with ___ Profiles *en cours* (at *add date*) (*links to site*)

The process includes several stages and usually takes one year or more to complete. It consists of the following;

- a request from the member State to the Education Committee for the Language Policy Division to participate with the member State in the development of a Profile
- a preliminary visit by a member of the Secretariat of the Language Policy Division and a potential Rapporteur to the member State to discuss the process and the specific focus, if required; this is followed by the appointment of 3-4 experts who will participate in the Profile process
- the production of a Country/Regional/City Report by or on behalf of the authorities of the member State or region or city
- a visit by the Expert Group (including a member of the Language Policy Division secretariat) to the country/region/city to meet stakeholders and visit institutions of education
- the production of an Experts' Report
- a roundtable meeting of Experts and stakeholders invited by the authorities to discuss the Experts' Report, adding and amending where necessary
- the production of a Profile by the Experts and the authorities, published jointly by the Language Policy Division and the authorities of the Country/Region; the Profile includes the (possibly amended) Country/Regional/City Report and a revised version of the Experts' Report.

Throughout this process, the Experts act as catalysts in the analysis by member States/regions/cities of their own Language Education Policy, bringing to the situation the Council of Europe perspective on language education and their individual

experience and expertise. This perspective takes account of Council of Europe policies and actions, including its conventions. In this way, language education policy in member States can develop in tune with the specific needs and circumstances of the country/region/city and take account of the broader European context and contemporary political and social change. For it is clear to all involved that language education policy is a dimension of social and economic policy at local, regional, national and European levels and must take in to account questions of social inclusion and equity in general and policies of education for democratic citizenship in particular.

2. Purposes of a transversal analysis

The outcomes of the Profile process are diverse. They include;

- providing specific input to educational reform in a member State
- creation of opportunities for stakeholders from different sectors of society to meet and share perspectives and opinions
- documentation of current and past policies and their implementation
- proposals for medium and long-term developments
- identification of new and imminent issues which education systems need to address.

Many outcomes are thus medium-term. The purpose of this transversal analysis is therefore to establish trends which may be appearing in the analyses, variations in the process and common and particular themes.

This analysis will function as a summary of the first few years of the Profile activity and a point of reference for the next period.

3. 'Common' themes

The diversity in member States and their particular preoccupations at a given point in time means that there are unlikely to be themes common to all Profiles except in a very general sense. The following themes appear in some Profiles and, taken together, provide an overview of current issues, which may well be present in other member States which have not yet engaged in the Profile process:

1. Language education and social policy

The significance of the linguistic competences of the population for the economic development of a member State in a period of globalisation of trade is recognised,

and the implications for individuals and their careers emphasised, for example in Cyprus:

Given its position at the cross roads between Europe and the Middle East and its limited natural resources, Cyprus has sought successfully to become a significant player in service industries in the region, notably in finance, and banking and in tourism. In this situation, there is great awareness in Cyprus of the relevance of education for careers. There is a premium on effective communication and languages are seen as important. Cyprus Profile (p23).

The potential of the individual for full participation in social processes in multilingual areas is strongly emphasised in Luxembourg:

On observe une complémentarité remarquable dans l'usage des trois langues. La répartition entre les différentes langues semble dépendre tout autant des secteurs d'activité et des types d'interactions personnelles que des facteurs géographiques. Luxembourg Profile (p9).

This theme is related to the question of identity.

2. Language education and (national/regional) identities

The development of language(s) acquired in the home, and in particular the acquisition of literacy during schooling, is closely related to the question of identification with a country and/or region. Profiles reveal the significance of language in identities:

The study of Standard Modern Greek in the Gymnasium aims at enabling children to understand the distinctive nature of the language and uniqueness of contemporary Greek civilisation and to treasure and enjoy its literature. Cyprus Profile (p13)

There are two varieties of Norwegian, nynorsk and bokmål both of which pupils have to learn (...) Norwegian is described as a subject which is crucial to identity; this has become an increasingly important element as the focus on identity/cultural belonging has become a major part of the teaching of Norwegian as 'education' (dannelse). Norway Profile (p13).

The role of non-standard varieties and of two or more languages/language varieties in linguistic identification is part of this complex issue, as is the need to establish a standard variety:

Central to language issues is Slovenian, a young official language which may still appear to suffer from a legitimacy deficit, if only relative. (...) "Modernisation of the Slovenian language course has stressed the communication functions of teaching whilst simultaneously taking account of the new social importance of language communities and the Slovenian State". In a newly independent State the national language may be expected to be the subject of debate and a source of concern, including as regards the teaching of

Slovenian to foreigners and the teaching of Slovenian outside Slovenia. Slovenia Profile (Chapter 2.2.1).

Further issues are raised by the historic presence of several languages within the frontiers of a state:

The treatment afforded to officially recognised minorities in the mixed territories is designed to facilitate management of these multilingual border areas (about 3000 Italian and 8500 Hungarian speakers), which serve as a kind of full-scale socio-linguistic laboratory. The organisation of language teaching on behalf of these minority language groups in Slovenia (see CR, pp 25-28, 51-75) is an integral fact of political life. Slovenia Profile (Chapter 2.2.2)

The presence of 'newcomers' may also raise concerns about identity:

The slow transformation of Italy from a land of emigrants (...) to a land of immigration came to an abrupt climax at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time the massive immigration of, above all, Albanians caused immediate problems (...) Later the immigrants moved to the north where they could find jobs more easily. The impact of the transfer movement was perceived (also by the press) as menacing, raising fears and political resistance. Lombardy Regional Report (p103-4).

The multilingualism of states and regions within them is often reflected in the plurilingualism of individuals, although this is not always recognised.

3. Potential for plurilingualism

The potential of all individuals to become plurilingual is a principle expounded by the Council of Europe and stated, for example, in the Profile for Slovenia and exemplified there.

Slovenia is rich in plurilingual potential because of the presence of speakers with varied linguistic repertoires, the collective acceptance of linguistic differences, individuals' desire to learn languages as a result of the geopolitical and economic context, substantial collective expertise in the field of language education and linguistics etc. Slovenia Profile (Chapter 1.3).

This potential is not always recognised when it is realised within a country:

Norway is a multilingual country, a country in which many languages are spoken, and Norwegians are plurilingual people, people who speak and / or understand several languages. This fact strikes outsiders immediately. It is not just a question of the well-known presence of Sami and other indigenous groups, nor the oft-cited proficiency of Norwegians in English. There are other long-established languages and many newly-arrived languages present in Norwegian society, and Norwegians have plurilingual competence much beyond the ability to speak English. (...) Much of this linguistic wealth is taken for

granted and underestimated. It is perhaps not even noticed by many young people who may for example complain about their lack of a full mastery of their second foreign language learnt at school rather than celebrate their plurilingualism. Norway Profile (p15).

In Luxembourg, the trilingualism of current education policy is well acknowledged but not clearly defined and not comprehensive:

Il va certes de soi, au Luxembourg, que le plurilinguisme visé par l'École doit intégrer des connaissances en luxembourgeois, en allemand et en français. Mais il doit tout autant englober des compétences communicatives en anglais et toutes les aptitudes linguistiques des individus dans d'autres variétés linguistiques que les quatre langues citées précédemment. Luxembourg Profile (p31).

4. The impact of English

The potential for plurilingualism includes acquisition of English in Luxembourg and needs to include English, whereas in Norway, the focus on English obscures the presence of other languages in the repertoire of Norwegian. The particular role of English cannot be ignored in the discussion of language learning inside and outside educational institutions. In Norway and Cyprus, attention is drawn to the acquisition of English outside formal education:

It is estimated that more English is used in Cyprus today than at any previous time (...) English is omnipresent in everyday life, through the media (...) tourism (...) and the influence of global American culture. (...) Thus the learning of English is far from dependent on the classroom and most Cypriots have the opportunity to practice their knowledge of the language, or at the very least their receptive competence, through regular exposure to English in everyday life. Cyprus Profile (p16).

The dominance of English in school and higher education curriculum is noted widely and in Lombardy much debated:

The decision to generalise the teaching of English in primary school to the exclusion of other languages is much debated within the education system. The decision is justified on the grounds of seeking to ensure continuity between primary and secondary school and of offering the compulsory study of a second foreign language in lower secondary school. Under the new system, students will be learning English for 13 years. Lombardy Profile (p18)

but the possibility of a 'ceiling effect' where students do not advance further despite continuing to study English is noted in Norway:

Students learn English throughout the curriculum, including a 'grunnkurs' (foundation course) in upper secondary education and vocational classes. However, as far as the curriculum is concerned, some educationists argue that the successive reforms have not built up a sufficiently coherent progressive learning content from the 1st Grade (...). Some people even believe that a

'ceiling effect', where students do not progress after a certain stage of development, cannot be avoided in the present system, and there is some suggestion that students' competence in academic English in Higher Education is poor. (...) Students may have very high conversational fluency which is in fact misleading and is not congruent with their academic proficiency, (...) Norway Profile (p17).

5. Other themes

Other themes which appear are not necessarily common to all Profiles but now form a check-list of issues to be considered in new Profiles for possible inclusion in the Country/Regional/City report and/or the Experts' Report.

They include:

- **role of the private sector in education:** this can include the significance of commercial language schools in developing the overall language capacity of a population
- **new/immigrant languages:** the question of migration and how education systems meet the linguistic and intercultural competence needs of temporary migrants or permanent immigrants - both adults and children - is important in many Council of Europe member States, both those which are 'hosts' and those which are senders'; the question of the relationship of language and identity is prominent in this context as is that of the linguistic competence expected or required for formal acquisition of citizenship
- **language education and education for democratic citizenship:** related to the above point but also with a much wider import is the question of how language education - in first, second and foreign languages - and its objectives can and should be associated with the objectives of education for democratic citizenship
- **decompartmentalisation of language education:** the Council of Europe's commitment to a holistic vision of language education - evident in the new project of 'Languages of Education' - which implies close collaboration among all teachers of languages horizontally in the curriculum and vertically from one educational institution to the next, is usually raised by Council of Europe experts as it is still largely under-developed in practice; in particular there is often a need to discuss how the teaching of the national/official language(s) is related to the teaching of second, immigrant/migrant and foreign languages and questions of curriculum design are particularly important here
- **rates of language acquisition and its assessment:** the CEFR and the levels it describes is frequently referred to in member States and their curricula documents and this often leads to discussion of what levels of competence can be expected at

different stages in an education system, how and when these should be assessed and how much timetable time should be dedicated to learning languages (first, second. (im)migrant and foreign)

- **training for principals and other language education policy makers:** the question of curriculum design and time allocation for language teaching and learning raise issues of training for principals and other making policy decisions at institutional level since they cannot be expected to understand the technical issues if they are not language specialists themselves

- **role of universities:** university and other higher education institutions (HEIs) have a significant role in planning for national capacity in foreign languages (including less frequently taught languages); similarly the significance of HEIs in teacher training is crucial to language education policy and any medium and long term planning; the question of the relationship of HEIs with schools is frequently important with respect to maintaining or creating a vertical coherence in language education

- **signed languages:** although signed languages are in some member States fully recognised and can be conceptualized within the Council of Europe's holistic vision of language education, it is often important to give particular attention to signed languages and inter alia the learning of other languages by sign language users.

4. Processes of the Profiles

(a) Purposes

From the perspective of the Council of Europe

- the Profile is a continuation of the policies and texts developed over many years (presented most recently in the Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe 2.2.1.) and summarised in the 50th Anniversary paper 'Plurilingual Education in Europe' (Feb 2006, p.4)

PLURILINGUALISM: all are entitled to develop a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages over their lifetime in accordance with their needs

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: Europe is multilingual and all its languages are equally valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity; the right to use and to learn one's language(s) is protected in Council of Europe Conventions

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING: the opportunity to learn other languages is an essential condition for intercultural communication and acceptance of cultural differences

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: participation in democratic and social processes in multilingual societies is facilitated by the plurilingual competence of individuals

SOCIAL COHESION: equality of opportunity for personal development, education, employment, mobility, access to information and cultural enrichment depends on access to language learning throughout life

- the procedures involved, symbolised in the notion of the Expert groups being a 'catalyst' for the process of self-evaluation by member States, are equally a continuation of the dialogic relationship between the Council of Europe and its

member States. In this dialogue, member States expect the Council of Europe, through its expert groups, to present a European agenda of policies and to make suggestions for their implementation in the circumstances peculiar to each member State. Although in some cases, Expert groups have been asked to make 'recommendations' to the member State, the Council of Europe does not make recommendations through the Profiles.

The Profiles, in their final form, contain a section which discusses future developments. This is variously called 'Visions and tasks for the future', or 'Possible future directions' or 'Prospects'. Since this is jointly co-written, like the rest of the Profile, by the Council of Europe and the authorities of the member State in question, there can be no formal 'recommendations', but in practice, this section is used as an opportunity to make suggestions, sometimes quite radical, which strongly reflect the Council of Europe agenda and the analyses by the Expert groups which benefit from an external perspective and critique.

From the perspective of member States:

- the reasons for embarking on the Profile process are various and not usually made evident in the Profile report itself. In the case of Norway, however, the profile took place during a period of educational reform which was documented in the Profile report and the Profile was seen as input to the debate, being eventually cited in documents proposing reforms. In other cases, the relationship between the Profile and contemporaneous processes in the education system of a member State are reported (e.g. the World-Language Strategy in Hungary) or implicit throughout the text.
- In some cases, the request for a Profile is made as part of an ongoing dialogue with the Council of Europe and/or may be part of the reflection stimulated by large-scale changes. Several member States which have changed radically since 1989, have requested Profiles. Others which have become recent members of the European Union have also requested Profiles.

(b) Procedures

Although the main features of the Profile process are present in all cases, there are variations according to circumstances:

National/Regional reports:

These are sometimes written by one or two individuals and sometimes by a group, in each case on behalf of the authorities, which 'sign off' the report and send it to the Council of Europe

Some reports serve as an opportunity for a comprehensive documentation of language teaching/learning in all sectors of the education system, obligatory and post-obligatory, public and private, from early years to life-long learning/adult education. Others focus on specific issues - with brief contextualisation - which are of particular interest at the time of the Profile.

There is variation in the amount of space dedicated to the 'issues for discussion' raised at the end of reports. In some cases (e.g. Ireland) it is clear that the authors and authorities have specific questions which they hope to see

addressed during the Profile process. In other cases (e.g. Slovenia) the issues are formulated as recommendations by the authors of the National/Regional Report. In the case of Norway, the 'issues for discussion' section is a substantial part of the analysis and refers to priorities decided by the Norwegian national authorities. In the case of Luxembourg, the authorities present their perspective and a number of frameworks within which changes could be considered.

There is considerable variation in the treatment of the 'national' language(s) but this is particularly strong where there is thematisation of the national language issue in society, and where the presence of linguistic minorities - both long-established and newcomer - makes language a constant matter of debate. On the other hand, there is little evidence of a holistic vision of language education embracing plurilingualism as a basis for policy.

Experts' Reports

Experts' Reports are not as widely available as Country/Regional reports or Profiles because they are written for the stakeholders within the country/region in question and distributed by the authorities. They are not made public on the Council of Europe website, unlike the Country Report and the Profile. Experts' Reports are written with a structure which anticipates and acts as a draft for the Profile. Like the Profile, they introduce the Profile process for readers, analyse the current situation and have a reaction on possible future developments. They differ from the Profile itself in that they are written by and in the name of the Experts and therefore reflect the specific investigation, analysis and interpretations of the Experts, some of which may be complemented and enriched in the Roundtable and subsequently by stakeholders and the authorities.

Consultation with stakeholders and Roundtables

Experts meet a range of stakeholders during their visit before writing their report. In advance of the visit a list of possible categories of people who could be invited is sent to the authorities and the person/people responsible for logistics. The decision about whom the Experts will meet is in the final analysis in the hands of the authorities, who often also add others to the list. The number of people who meet the Experts during their visit varies considerably from case to case, sometimes including large groups of people and always including representatives of organisations (e.g. of employers, employees, teachers, parents, pupils, headteachers, etc).

Usually all those whom the Experts meet during their visit are invited to the Roundtable, and often others are invited too. The decision about the invitations and the nature of the programme is in the hands of the authorities (in consultation with the Rapporteur if necessary).

Language Education Policy Profiles

The Profiles are made public on the Council of Europe website in tandem with the Country/Regional reports. The two are to be taken together as the product of the Profile process. Publication within the country/region in question is a matter for the authorities.

The Profile is drafted by the Rapporteur and finalized in consultation with the authorities. In some cases, the final version of the Profile has been considered, amended and approved at the highest levels in ministries of education.

The Profile reports follow the same basic pattern: an executive summary, an explanation of the Profile process and its purposes, an analysis of the current situation, a discussion of possible future developments and appendices giving essential information on the Council of Europe's documents and policies, on the membership of the Expert Group and national/regional experts and on the programme of visits.

5 Outcomes from the Profiles

The Profiles do not contain 'recommendations'. They do include however consideration of possible 'future directions'. These are tailored to the specific case but in most cases they include the following points which thus form a common basis on which policy deciders and those who implement policy might meet:

- Although there is often much innovation, there is often a lack of dissemination of findings and of an overall perspective on what direction language education policy should take. In several cases, there is a suggestion that a national or regional council be formed to address all language education policy (including the teaching of the national language(s) and languages used as media of instruction). To provide support for this approach, there have also been suggestions that a resource and development centre be established.
- Policy matters are often seen as the business of high level deciders but the Profiles often make the point that policy is made locally as well and indeed within each educational institution, whether school or university. The role of school principals in policy making is highlighted and the need to provide them with appropriate and adequate understanding of language education, in which they may not be well-versed.
- The significance of teacher education in the implementation of policy changes is widely recognised and each Profile deals in detail with teacher education policy and discusses short- and medium-term developments. Short-term developments are crucial since changes in policy are usually sought immediately but medium-term changes in teacher education are also discussed according to the specific context.

- The holistic vision of a curriculum which implements education for plurilingualism is fundamental to all Profiles and depends ultimately on the understanding and flexibility of teachers and school principals. There is reference to the need for decompartmentalisation of the curriculum 'horizontally' so that teachers and learners of several languages draw on the concept of plurilingualism in their planning of teaching and learning. Similarly there is emphasis on the importance of a coherent 'vertical' planning especially across the boundaries of different schools and universities through which learners progress over time. It is here in particular that the Profiles point to the instruments provided by the Council of Europe (especially the *Common European Framework of Reference*; the *European Language Portfolio*; the *Guide for Language Education Policy in Europe*). The significance of these is usually well understood but not always known to all those involved in language education, and

6 Follow-up and future developments

Hitherto follow-up has consisted of information on the impact of the Profile being conveyed to the Language Policy Division, usually by the liaison person who worked with the Experts and the LPD.

It might be envisaged that the LPD offer to review with the authorities after a period of time, of perhaps 2-3 years, the impact and possible further consultation and advice needed.

In all cases, the Experts have taken a holistic view of language education and included the teaching of L1s/languages of education/national languages in their discussions with stakeholders. It is nonetheless the case that the Council of Europe is perceived as a body concerned with foreign languages and discussion of policy for other languages is not easily developed with stakeholders.

The Language Policy Division has now launched a new project on the languages of education (LE) which includes the teaching of 'national' languages (language(s) as subject - LS), languages used as media of instruction across the curriculum (LAC), as well as foreign and minority languages. It would therefore be possible to draw on the expertise generated in this project to carry out complementary analyses for those member States where Profiles have already been produced (or are currently being produced).

In future Profiles, it will be important to draw on the new project (for example by including experts on LS and LAC in the expert groups. There will be an even stronger case than hitherto to ensure that the significance of language learning for social inclusion policy is addressed.

List of Profiles completed (this needs checking):

(In chronological order)

Hungary

Norway

Cyprus

Luxembourg

Slovenia

Lombardy

Ireland

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Poland

Slovakia

Profiles currently in process:

Armenia

Estonia

Sheffield

Slovakia

Val d'Aoste

Michael Byram

January 2008

(with advice from Jean-Claude Beacco and Daniel Coste)