

## ***Languages for Europe Think Tank – 16 June 2007***

# **Evaluation**

## **Introduction**

### **Evaluation Group: June 2007 session of the Think Tank and beyond**

I refer to the follow-up paper 'Languages for Europe: in pursuit of criteria for evaluation' [sent out by Tony O'Brien as part of a batch of papers to colleagues in all three groups on 9 February]. The main areas of interest to colleagues at the January meeting may be summarised as follows:

- small-scale curricular projects (for example, projects submitted for the European Label)
- the quality of language provision with a particular focus on the learning experience.

However, the 'next steps' proposed in the follow-up paper were probably over-ambitious, given the likely timescales and resources, and there has been a 'rejig' on a more modest scale.

Under A, an extensive exploration of sources will not be possible, but a brief contextual paper is offered: 'Sources and contexts' (attached) looks at some aspects of languages in Europe with comment on some of the significant sources. Obviously, this paper can be expanded to take into account any additional sources subsequently identified by colleagues.

Under B and C, rather than thinking in terms of identifying gaps and inviting colleagues to draft criteria to cover them, we believe it would better simply to take up the offers which three colleagues have already made. We are very grateful to Hanna Komorowska, Maria Matheidesz and Philida Schellekens for volunteering, and agreeing to present to a plenary instead of to a group discussion which we originally envisaged.

Each of these three colleagues will outline what she has in mind to the June meeting with a view to drafting, after reflection, a paper for the Autumn. Their contributions may be described briefly as follows:

- **Hanna Komorowska** will look at criteria which would help learners and teachers to evaluate their own work on small projects such as those conducted under the European Language Label or e-Twinning. As evaluating one's own projects is a form of self-assessment, Hanna would like to look at how self-assessment skills of language learners (e.g. via the ELP) and teachers (e.g. via the ECML's EPOSTL project) contribute to planning built-in evaluation components of language projects.
- **Maria Matheidesz** will offer a short presentation on the EAQUALS criteria for assessing learning in the classroom and a brief introduction to the EAQUALS Self-help Guides which deal with curriculum and syllabus design and with lesson observation with a particular emphasis on identifying teacher development and training needs.
- **Philida Schellekens** will look at a commonly used tool for evaluation: the observation of classroom interaction. She will use the Common Inspection Framework, developed in England, to explore criteria for evaluation, with a special focus on both the quality of the learning experience and the quality of teaching.

It hoped that these initial contributions will spark further ideas which members of the evaluation group, or of other groups, might wish to develop separately.

Alan Dobson

(on behalf of the Evaluation Group)

05.06.2007

### **Task for our June meeting**

Think Tank members are invited to read the attached papers and

- be ready to comment on Alan Dobson's initial draft;
- ... and to respond to his 'invitations' on p.7 and 9 of the attached;
- ... and to respond to Philida Schellenkens' invitation (p.10).

Then in the meeting members will be encouraged to respond to the three presentations outlined above and "spark further ideas" as Alan mentions.

TOB

06.06.07

*INITIAL DRAFT – N.B. This paper is offered as an initial draft which may be expanded and/or adapted in the light of suggestions from colleagues. All references need checking.*

## **Languages for Europe: in pursuit of criteria for evaluation**

### **Sources and contexts**

#### **Introduction**

At the January meeting of the Think Tank, the evaluation group agreed that work could be usefully done on identifying sources and criteria in two areas:

- small-scale curricular projects (for example, projects submitted for the European Label)
  
- the quality of language provision with a particular focus on the learning experience.

In languages, as in other areas of education, policies and practices need to be analysed and evaluated effectively in order to inform action. One has to know to what extent a particular policy or practice is successful, and if so, why. It is particularly important to establish whether a policy or practice is transferable to other situations or countries. Often time and resources will not permit specific research to be commissioned, but available evidence must be taken properly into account if recommendations are to be based on or more than personal opinion or preference.

An essential starting point concerns exploring sources to identify precedents and contexts. This involves pursuing with rigour questions such as:

*Have we covered all the sources (surveys? research? inspection reports? etc?)*

*Have we fully understood the (national) context and the precedents?*

*Are we comparing like with like?*

*Is there evidence of sustained success?*

*What are the costs involved?*

## Sources: international

The main international sources on (foreign) language education comprise projects and studies undertaken by:

- The European Union
- The Council of Europe's Language Policy Division (LPD)
- The Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)
- Professional organisations such as the European Association for Quality Language services (EAQUALS)

### The European Union

The European Union produces a series of 'Studies concerning language learning and teaching' as well as the well known 'Key data' reports on languages published by the Eurydice Unit ([www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice](http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice)).

Since 1999, some 14 Studies have been have appeared. A list of these can be found at [www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/key/studies\\_en.html](http://www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/key/studies_en.html)

The studies are published in English and usually at least one other language (most often French and German). They vary considerably in scale, scope and perhaps quality. Many of them are perhaps best seen as surveys with a research element rather than research as such.

Collectively, the studies provide a useful resource for identifying developments in language teaching and learning across Europe and relating these developments to contexts. When a new policy or initiative is proposed in any country or organisation, it is important to check whether there are precedents and whether these were established in comparable contexts.

For example, a study on CLIL (2006)<sup>1</sup> illustrates the range of situations covered by experience of this approach to the teaching and learning of languages. One on special educational needs

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<sup>1</sup> *Content and Language Integrated Learning at School in Europe*, 2006.

and languages (2005)<sup>2</sup> reminds us that the definition of special educational needs varies greatly from one system to another. The variations in the proportion of learners considered to have special educational needs may point to differences in definition and the statistical implications of these, rather than indicate that some countries have more learners with special educational needs than others. The recent study on the teaching of languages to very young learners (2007)<sup>3</sup> brings together a range of sources. It indicates factors associated with success in early language learning, but also makes clear that an early start will not in itself bring about success unless certain conditions are met. The study on the training of teachers of a foreign language (2002) is a useful compendium of developments in Europe and illustrates the great variety of provision. It also provides some of the basis for the European Profile for Language Teacher Education (2004)<sup>4</sup>.

### **The Council of Europe: Language Policy Division (Strasbourg)**

[\[www.coe.int/languages\]](http://www.coe.int/languages)

The Council of Europe's Language Policy Division (LPD) is well known for its seminal work on the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* and the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)*. More recently, it has been developing its *Manual for relating languages examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference* accompanied by illustrative materials to exemplify standards in a range of languages.

Rather less well known so far are the *Guide for the development of language education policies* and the series of 'language education policy profiles.'

#### *The Guide*

The Council of Europe summarises the *Guide* as follows:

'The aim of the *Guide* is to offer an analytical instrument which can serve as a reference document for the formulation or reorganisation of language teaching in member states.

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<sup>2</sup> *Insights & Innovation. Special Educational Needs in Europe. The Teaching and Learning of Languages*, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> *The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners*, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *The Training of Teachers of a Foreign Language: Developments in Europe*, 2002. *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference*, 2004.

Its purpose is to provide a response to the need to formulate language policies to promote plurilingualism and diversification in a planned manner so that decisions are coherently linked. Accordingly, the *Guide* does not promote any particular language education policy but attempts to identify the challenges and possible responses in the light of common principles.

It constitutes one of the key documents for the development of (national or regional) Language Education Policy Profiles.’

### The ‘profiles’

The Council of Europe states:

‘The Language Policy Division offers expertise to assist member states who so wish in reflecting upon their language education policy.

This activity provides member states (or regions and cities) with the opportunity to undertake a self-evaluation of their policy in a spirit of dialogue with Council of Europe experts with a view to focusing on possible future policy developments within the country.

Developing a Language Education Policy Profile does not mean external evaluation. It is a process of reflection by the authorities and involving civil society together with the contribution of Council of Europe experts who have the function of acting as catalysts in this process.’

To date, seven Language Education Policy Profiles have been published: Hungary, Norway, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Slovenia, the region of Lombardy (Italy), and Lithuania. Profiles are in progress on Ireland, Poland, the Slovak Republic, the region of Val d’ Aosta (Italy) and the City of Sheffield (England).

Although the situations in the countries and regions are quite different, many of the themes are similar. For example, various issues surface quite often, such as the second foreign language in schools, diversification of language provision beyond English, early language learning, languages in vocational education and the contribution of teacher education and training to bringing about change. Used selectively, the profiles can provide a valuable source of insights into similar issues in other countries.

## **The Council of Europe: European Centre for Modern Languages (Graz)**

[\[www.ecml.at\]](http://www.ecml.at)

The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), a Council of Europe institution established under an enlarged Partial Agreement involving 33 of the 47 member states, has as its mission:

- the implementation of languages policies;
- the promotion of innovative approaches to the learning and teaching of modern languages.

As well as its reports on specific aspects of teaching and learning, the ECML has produced publications which provide insights into the evaluation of quality. These include *Quality Management in Languages Education* (2003).

Projects in progress under the current Second Medium Term Programme (MTP2) of the ECML include:

- A Training Guide for quality assurance (Qualitraining)
- From Profile to Portfolio: a framework for reflection in language teacher education (FTE)
- The CLIL quality matrix (CLIL Matrix)

### **Professional associations**

Various international professional associations produce instruments for analysing and promoting quality through evaluation. Not the least of these is EAQUALS [\[www.eaquals.org\]](http://www.eaquals.org). EAQUALS has developed a number of instruments including a 'Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Schools'.

[References to other associations to be added...]

### ***INVITATION: The Think Tank and international sources***

*The above outline of useful sources does not claim to be exhaustive. Members of the Think Tank are invited to put forward further suggestions.*

## Sources: National systems of education

There is a range of experience of (self) evaluation across Europe. It is possible that approaches established in one country may provide insights into practice which is transferable to other contexts and countries.

For example, the United Kingdom (England) has a well-developed system of inspection for all phases of education from early years to adult education, organised by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) [ [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)]. Increasingly, this process has been linked to self-evaluation. The 'Framework for the inspection of schools in England' (July 2005) covers both primary and secondary education. Schools and other institutions are expected to review their progress annually using the published criteria for inspection and self-evaluation. When an inspection takes place (usually every three years), the inspection team take as one of the starting-points the school's or institution's conclusions from its self-evaluation processes and compares these with the independent observations and analyses by the team.

OFSTED also publishes a 'Handbook for the inspection of teacher training' (July 2005) The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) [ [www.tda.gov.uk](http://www.tda.gov.uk) ] publishes the professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and (annually) a Handbook of Guidance for teacher trainers.

As well as reports on individual schools and colleges, OFSTED publishes from time to time thematic reports on particular phases of education and individual subjects, such as modern foreign languages, for example *Primary modern foreign languages in initial teacher training* (2003).

Evaluation also plays an important part in the development of the National Strategy for Languages in England<sup>5</sup>. Larger projects are subject to review through independent research commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills [ [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk) ].

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<sup>5</sup> [www.dfes.gov.uk/languagestrategy](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languagestrategy)

For example, baseline research<sup>6</sup> was carried out when policy on languages in primary education was strengthened in 2002 and this is now being followed up by two further national research projects.

Small pilot projects funded by the DfES also receive independent evaluation. The reports are not necessarily published but their broad conclusions are made known in professional circles. Recent evaluations include a CLIL pilot and an initiative involving online learning for secondary school pupils.

Although the publications and instruments mentioned above are designed for use within one national system (England), they may offer some insights into evaluation which may be applicable in other countries. No doubt there are publications and instruments in other countries which in turn would offer insights to readers in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe.

***INVITATION: The Think Tank and national sources***

*A valuable function of the Think Tank could be to identify those features of instruments within national systems which might contribute to wider European discussion of evaluation of policy and practice in the languages field. Colleagues are invited to provide references where relevant.*

AD

05.06.07

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<sup>6</sup> Driscoll, P, Jones J, and Macrory, G, *The Provision of Foreign Language Learning for Pupils at Key Stage 2 (DfES Research Report 572)*, DfES London, 2004.

Philida Schellekens - abstract for June 2007 Think Tank

## **The evaluation of teaching and learning in England**

Since 2001 OFSTED, the organisation responsible for the inspection of education and training, has used the Common Inspection Framework. This guides education and training providers and inspectors to assess the quality of provision under five key headings:

1. Achievement & standards
2. The effectiveness of teaching and learning
3. Meeting the needs and interests of the learners
4. Guidance and support for learners
5. Leadership and management

The experience of the learner is central to any monitoring of provision. This has had a subtle but profound impact on the way that the education sector views quality. For example, in the past classroom activity is likely to have been assessed in terms of teacher performance. Now the accent is much more on whether the learners are learning; whether the programme of learning suits the learners' needs; and whether they are achieving to their ability. This type of evaluation is now also used for organisation's own internal audits of the quality of provision.

While it can be difficult to capture evidence of language learning because it is often not a sequential or linear process, nevertheless taking this angle on classroom activity has proved a real catalyst for analysis and staff development. I would welcome any thoughts from Think Tank colleagues on this approach to evaluation.

[PS / 05.06.07]