

Languages for Europe Think Tank – 16 June 2007

Language Education Policy Profiles

Introduction

Following our January meeting, the British Council has been in discussion with the Council of Europe about the possibility of working together on a study of the Language Education Policy Profiles which it has 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.

Task for our June meeting

Think Tank members are invited to read the attached paper from Mike Byram and

- Comment on issues raised on page 3 of the paper;
- Consider what sort of issues are worth following up in our countries;
- Think about how individuals and organizations might usefully contribute to a transversal study and how they might use the outputs.

Members might like to read at least the Conclusions of one or more of the Profiles which have been published on the Council of Europe's website. Appendix 1 of Mike Byram's paper provides a list of Profiles published, with embedded links to the website (or see the link from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Profils_EN.asp).

TOB / TB

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Language Education Policy Profiles

(British Council Think Tank Meeting – Berlin, June 2007)

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 pilot Profile was carried out in Hungary. Since then, Profiles have been instigated in 12 member States and 1 Region of a member State. Completed Profiles exist for 7 member States and 1 Region, with other Profiles ongoing (including the first one to be carried out in a city) – see appendix 1.

The process¹ includes several stages and can take up to one year 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 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.

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. 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

¹ More details, including guidelines for preparation of reports, can be found at www.coe.int/lang

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.

The focus of the Profile is determined by the Member state and the Council of Europe in consultation. It should however include all languages of education – the ‘national’ language and/or the language(s) used for instruction in schools and other educational institutions; ‘foreign’ languages’ languages of minorities or regions (both long established and new languages and language groups, including sign languages). The contribution to the whole process from the Council of Europe is an emphasis on its policy for education for plurilingualism and intercultural competence, and on the significance of language education as part of social policy (see appendix 2). It is not simply a matter of bringing technical expertise to the analysis although the Council of Europe Experts do have a wide range of experience and technical expertise in language education too.

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 and, after only a short period of activity, it is not possible to evaluate the impact of the Profiles in member States or more widely. 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 transversal analysis will consider:

- the contents of several elements of the Profiles, i.e. the Country Reports, the Experts’ Reports and the Language Education Policy Profiles;
- the themes which appear in several, if not all, of the Profiles;
- the themes which are specific to member States;
- the process, its purposes and procedures.

3 The BC Think-tank contribution

The preceding paragraphs are taken from the first draft of a Transversal Study. The Think Tank discussion could be a valuable external input to the process of producing a transversal study which will continue into 2008.

The issues which have arisen so far include:

In terms of **general matters and principles**:

- the need to emphasize the social policy dimension of language education as this is not always at the forefront of discussions in the language teaching profession;
- the relationship with citizenship is not well understood;
- the relationship of foreign language teaching and 'national' languages (and minority languages) is not seen as a priority in most countries and it is difficult to stimulate a discussion of the potential for a holistic approach to language education;

in terms of **processes**:

- each Profile is written largely by the leader/Rapporteur of the Experts Group and there is variation in the approaches (within a broad framework);
- there is variation in the documentation used and provided in the final Profile; so there is a question of whether it is desirable to have homogeneity in approach.

The Think Tank could usefully **comment on these issues** but it would also be helpful to have **comments of any other kind** which those involved in the process of Profiles may not see from their insider perspective.

Michael Byram
May 07

Appendix 1
Table of Profiles finalised or underway, in alphabetical order

National or Regional Reports are elaborated by the relevant authorities and are generally provided in one language only (either English or French)

	Language Education Policy Profile <i>(final document)</i>	National or Regional Report <i>(in the original language)</i>	Stage
	Armenia		Planned
	Austria	In preparation	
3	Cyprus Profile 2005 - <u>English</u> - <u>Français</u>	<u>Country Report</u> (2004)	Completed
1	Hungary Profile 2003 - <u>English</u> - <u>Français</u>	<u>Country Report</u> (2002)	Completed
	Ireland	<u>Country Report</u> (2005)	In development
7	Lithuania Profile 2007 - <u>English</u>	<u>Country Report</u> (2004)	Completed
6	Lombardy Profile 2006 - <u>English</u>	<u>Regional Report</u> (2005)	Completed
4	Luxembourg Profile 2006 - <u>Français</u>	<u>Rapport national</u> (2005)	Completed
2	Norway Profile 2004 - <u>English</u> - <u>Français</u>	<u>Country Report</u> (2003)	Completed
	Poland	<u>Country Report</u> (2005)	In development
	Sheffield		Planned
	Slovak Republic	<u>Rapport national</u> (2004)	Final stage
5	Slovenia Profile 2006 - <u>Français</u>	<u>Country Report</u> (2003) <u>Rapport national</u> (2003)	Completed
	Val d'Aosta	In preparation	

*The original language version of reports (English or French) appears first
The number refers to the chronological order of completion*

Appendix 2 - Extract from Council of Europe Policy on language education (www.coe.int/lang)

Council of Europe language education policy

The Council of Europe's activities to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in the field of education are carried out within the framework of article 2 of the European Cultural Convention, which commits the states party to the Convention to promote the reciprocal teaching and learning of their languages.

Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible:

- a. encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory,
- b. *endeavour to promote the study of its languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory.*

In the spirit of this article the Council of Europe's work in the area of language education policy has developed over five decades in response to the changing needs and priorities of member states. The Council promotes policies which strengthen linguistic diversity and language rights, deepen mutual understanding, consolidate democratic citizenship and sustain social cohesion.

Council of Europe language education policies aim to promote:

- **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

Policies for plurilingualism

The emphasis from an early stage in Council of Europe projects on successful communication skills, motivated by increasing opportunities for interaction and mobility in Europe, remains important, but globalisation and internationalisation pose new challenges to social cohesion and integration. Language skills remain essential if individuals are to benefit from opportunities in employment and mobility but they are also necessary to participate actively in the social and political processes which are an integral part of democratic citizenship in the multilingual societies of Council of Europe member states.

This increasing focus on language policies for democratic citizenship and social cohesion reflects the priority which the Council of Europe accords to education for citizenship and intercultural dialogue in the 21st century. It is reflected in the goal of education for plurilingual and intercultural citizens capable of interacting in a number of languages across linguistic and cultural boundaries.