

1. Editors' Foreword

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This publication has three functions. First, it summarises the achievements of the second medium-term programme of the European Centre for Modern Languages, which ran from 2004-2007 under the title of *Languages for social cohesion*. Second, it contains the proceedings of the ECML Conference, held in September 2007 at the University of Graz, to mark the completion of this programme. Third, it provides a preview of the projects which comprise the next medium-term programme of the ECML (2008-2011), *Empowering language professionals: competences – networks – impact – quality*.

The publication is divided into six sections as follows:

Section 1: this includes an introduction by the Executive Director of the ECML, Adrian Butler, a message to the ECML Conference 2007 by Council of Europe Secretary General Terry Davis, and an address by Joseph Sheils, Head of the Council's Department of Language Education and Policy, outlining recent developments in language policy within the Council of Europe.

Section 2: two keynote speakers at the conference provide a stimulating discussion of diverse aspects of social cohesion. Lucija Čok, professor of Multilingualism and Interculturalism at the University of Primorska, Slovenia, and Joe Lo Bianco, Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia, examine the question of languages for social cohesion from a political and socio-cultural perspective respectively.

Section 3: in this section the consultants to the ECML second medium-term programme comment on the four strands which comprised the programme:

- A. Coping with linguistic and social diversity;
- B. Communication in a multicultural society;
- C. Professional development and reference tools;
- D. Innovative approaches and new technologies.

Each discusses the projects which were carried out within one of the strands and explains how they have contributed to the topic in particular and to the overall aim of the programme in general.

Section 4: this part of the publication is devoted to “external contributions” to the conference: articles which were submitted in the framework of a call for papers, which took place prior to the conference. The papers, which were presented during the conference, are organised according to the four strands of the second medium-term programme referred to above.

Section 5: five language experts who hold important functions within European language teaching associations and institutions were invited to attend the conference and, in the form of a panel discussion, to present their views on the ECML’s second medium-term programme. These were: Carol Taylor, President of the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS); Terry Lamb, President of the World Federation of Modern Language Associations (FIPLV); Janina Zielińska, Vice President of the International Federation of French Teachers (FIPF); Gé Stoks, Editor of the Swiss language education journal *Babylonia*; and Anne Gallagher, Director of the Language Centre of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. In this part of the publication they give the views from the perspective of their respective organisation.

Section 6: the final section takes a look forward at the new medium-term programme *Empowering language professionals*, which was launched in 2008 and which will run until 2011. Here project consultants consider the four strands of the new programme (evaluation, continuity in language learning, content and language education, and plurilingual education) and also the topic of European tools for language education policies.

This publication can only provide a short glimpse of the work accomplished by the projects of the second medium-term programme and related activities outside the ECML. However, it is hoped that readers will be animated to refer to the project publications to get a full view of the results.

The projects in each of the four strands of the second medium-term programme have all contributed substantially to European language education by exploring basic issues and theoretical foundations of the respective areas, but even more so by providing training materials for teachers, teacher trainers and other professionals. And, in addition to offering new insights and usable materials, new pathways for future research and development have been opened up.

All in all, the publication should provide an overview of current issues and trends in European language teaching and provide some indication of perspectives for the future.

2. Introduction

Languages for social cohesion: the 2004–2007 programme of the European Centre for Modern Languages

Adrian Butler
Executive Director (2003–2008), ECML Graz

Introduction

Between 2004 and 2007, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) ran its second medium-term programme on the theme *Languages for social cohesion: language education in a multilingual and multicultural Europe*.

The title of the programme was chosen by the Centre's Governing Board in 2003 in recognition of the fact that improving social cohesion is one of the major challenges currently facing our societies. The ECML's programme was designed to contribute to this quest by examining language education's role in forging better understanding and mutual respect between the citizens of Europe. Twenty-one projects run by language experts from the whole of Europe were chosen for inclusion in the four-year programme by the Governing Board.

To mark the completion of this programme and to present the results of the projects, the ECML Conference 2007 was held on 27-29 September 2007 at the Karl-Franzens University in Graz. Some 250 experts from Europe and beyond gathered for this event, which was a broad platform for language professionals to present their work on developing and implementing instruments and tools to improve the teaching and learning of languages in the context of securing greater social cohesion.

This publication is both an introduction to the results of the 2004-2007 programme and a summary of the proceedings of the conference.

Languages for social cohesion

Barriers to communication are very often a threat to the cohesion of our societies. Prejudice feeds on ignorance and the lack of a common language, either metaphorical or real, between people provides an ideal terrain in which ignorance of the other flourishes.

Surmounting the language barrier requires first of all, considerable willpower. But in Europe, despite the achievements of the movement towards European integration, we are still surprisingly stubborn in referring to the notion of “foreign” languages which belong to “foreigners” who live “abroad”. We hide behind the concept of national cultures and languages, rather than see our European partners as neighbours in a shared community.

The second prerequisite is effective teaching. In the long period of peace since the end of the last war culminating in the opening up of our previously divided continent, successive generations of Europeans have been given the opportunity to learn languages at school. However, the results have not really been very impressive so far in terms of the percentage of young people coming out of our education systems with real communicative competence in one – let alone two or more – European languages.

To reverse this trend, the European institutions have developed policies and instruments promoting plurilingualism and pluriculturalism: learning languages with the aim of being able to establish real communication with other Europeans and getting to know their cultures. The ECML finds its *raison d’être* in this movement.

But just as these efforts to promote the effective learning of modern languages begin to bear fruit, we have become aware that our societies have undergone great changes over the last decade due to movements of population from within Europe and beyond. One of the results of this is that, increasingly, language barriers also exist within our societies.

With our traditional, monolingual reasoning, we had overlooked the problems faced by those who do not have an adequate command of the official language(s) used in our countries. Today, for example, we can no longer count on all the children arriving in our state education systems having the necessary knowledge of the languages used within these systems to be able to follow the curricula successfully.

These barriers to communication very often contribute to increasing the social exclusion of groups within our societies whose position is already fragile due to a number of other factors.

Thus we see that language learning does not only have an important role to play in the ongoing construction of Europe, but also in the cohesion of our own national societies. We must consequently adapt the knowledge and expertise gained through teaching “foreign” languages to teaching the languages of our education systems.

The ECML does not have the pretension to claim that its projects have come up with easy recipes for how language education can solve the problems described above. Nevertheless, the extensive collection of practical outcomes resulting from the projects of its 2004-2007 programme represents a set of valuable building blocks for use by those working to reduce these obstacles to communication within our societies.

The 2004-2007 programme

The four thematic strands into which the ECML's 2004-2007 programme was divided give a clearer image of the ambitions of the programme and the scope of these results:

- First of all, “Coping with linguistic and social diversity: provisions, profiles, materials”. Not, as the verb sometimes implies in English “putting up” with diversity, but accepting it, confronting it and turning it into a positive force for moving towards the other and accepting “otherness” as a valuable extra, a source of enrichment and a heritage and right to be respected and promoted in our societies. The Centre's role in this process is clearly spelt out in the second half of the title: coming up with practical tools to be used by language educators.
- The projects of the second strand, “Communication in a multicultural society: the development of intercultural competence”, develop a different aspect of this premise. Learning another language implies journeying into another culture and moving away from the security of one's own cultural landmarks. To do this successfully supposes adequate training in developing intercultural communicative competence. This includes the ability to reflect critically about one's own cultural heritage and to be able to mediate it to people from other cultural backgrounds.
- The third strand, “Professional development and reference tools”, includes the projects that relate most closely to the ECML's vocation as an institution devoted to the training of multipliers and to enhancing the status and performance of language educators. Naturally enough, in view of the Centre's Council of Europe lineage, applications of the instruments developed in Strasbourg – the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* and the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* – figure prominently in these projects. But other new reference tools with exciting potential also came out of this strand.
- The last strand, “Innovative approaches and new technologies in the teaching and learning of languages”, links directly to the Centre's mission as set down in its Statute (“the implementation of language policies” and “the promotion of innovative approaches to the learning and teaching of modern languages”). In an age where the technological revolution has become a daily reality and where young people spend large amounts of their time in a virtual, digital world, it is an immense challenge for language education to embrace this movement and take advantages of the myriad opportunities offered, particularly by the Internet.

The results of the projects run within these strands of the Centre's second medium-term programme and presented at the ECML Conference 2007 are described briefly in Section 3 of this publication. We have not gone into greater detail as they may be consulted and downloaded directly online from the ECML's website (www.ecml.at).

The ECML Conference 2007

The Conference was first and foremost a shop window for the ECML's 2004-2007 programme results. But the Centre made a special effort to open up the proceedings to international experts with a broader perspective on the question of languages for social cohesion.

These were, firstly, the guest speakers: Lucija Čok, Rector of the University of Primorska and former Slovenian Minister of Education, who set the subject of language education in its institutional, legal and economic framework; and Jo Lo Bianco, Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Melbourne, Australia, who approached social cohesion from a historical and sociolinguistic perspective.

The European institutions were represented by Joseph Sheils, Head of the Council of Europe's Department of Language Education and Policy, who described the Council's work on language policies and standards, and Harald Hartung, Head of Multilingualism Policy Unit at the European Commission, who presented its work on multilingualism, social cohesion and the intercultural dialogue.

The Conference then broke into parallel working sessions, each devoted to one of the four sub-themes of the Centre's programme: linguistic and social diversity; intercultural communication; teacher development; and innovative approaches. These included presentations of the results of the Centre's 21 projects by their co-ordinators but also contributions from international experts not involved in the ECML's activities whose participation had been solicited as a way of extending the scope of the conference proceedings. The results of the working sessions were summarised in plenary by the consultants to the Centre's 2004-2007 programme.

Then, once again with the objective of gaining a broad view on the topics under discussion, a panel discussion was held, involving experts representing a number of different "specialities" in language education: Carol Taylor, President of the European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS); Terry Lamb, President of the World Federation of Modern Language Associations (FIPLV); Janina Zielińska, Vice President of the International Federation of French Teachers (FIPF); Gé Stoks, Editor of the Swiss language education journal *Babylonia*; and Anne Gallagher, Director of the Language Centre of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

Their discussions spotlighted the achievements and challenges arising from the conference, seen from the different perspectives of each contributor, and proposed input for the orientation of future reforms and developments in the practice of language teaching and learning in Europe.

This forward-looking panel discussion represented the bridge between the 2004-2007 programme that had just ended and the new 2008-2011 programme, *Empowering language professionals: competences – networks – impact – quality*, which had, only the day before, been confirmed by the ECML's Governing Board. To close the

proceedings, the consultants to the new programme gave a presentation of how the future projects were expected to contribute to the four thematic focuses that had been chosen: evaluation, continuity in language learning, content and language education, and plurilingual education.

A personal note

The ECML Conference 2007 represented the culmination of my five years' tenure as Executive Director of the ECML. During this time I was fortunate enough to be able to oversee the finalisation of the first medium-term programme, to supervise the running of the whole of the second and to witness the launching of the third. I would like to pay tribute to all of the colleagues, collaborators and participants in the ECML's "extended family" whom I had occasion to work with over these five years.

I reserve a special final word of thanks for the ECML staff who work daily at the Nikolaiplatz premises in Graz. It has been a privilege to work with such committed and hard-working colleagues, whose enthusiasm for the Centre and its work is palpable to all who come into contact with the ECML.

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