# The Council of Europe's Platform of Resources and References for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education

Michael Byram*[a], Michael Fleming[b]

**Article Info**

**Abstract**

The Council of Europe has created for teachers and other professionals in education a Platform of Resources and References for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education (PIE). The platform presents both the principles of PIE and recommendations and suggestions for how PIE can be implemented in Europe's schools. This article describes and explains the nature of the platform, its origins and its purposes. The origins of the project which the platform embodies lie in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* which creates transparency and coherence for all who are professionally involved in foreign language teaching and the platform extends this to all languages present in schools. The platform also has an explicit purpose of promoting quality in education through better understanding of the role of language in all learning. It introduces too a further development of the concept of intercultural competences and education. After the analysis of the origins and purposes, this article presents and analyses some key documents available on the platform, documents which deal with the main issues it addresses including education for vulnerable learners, the role of language in the learning of all subjects in the curriculum, and the aims of language teaching.

*[a] Correspoding author: University of Durham, England. m.s.byram@durham.ac.uk
[b]University of Durham, England

## Introduction

Our journal's title links the two key concepts of 'language' and 'education' through the conjunction 'and', usefully leaving open how to interpret the relationship. In the title of the Council of Europe's project which is the subject of this article the use of the adjective 'plurilingual' reflects a view of education as inherently 'lingual', that education cannot be separated from language and languages. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the adjective 'intercultural', and the linking of the two adjectives with 'and' means here that these two concepts, too, are inseparable. One of the purposes of the "Platform of Resources and References for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education" (hereafter the Platform) is to reinforce the inherent relationships among 'plurilingual', 'intercultural' and 'education' and to provide the means of analysing and synthesising them in ways which allow educationists in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe (CoE) to provide quality and equity in education. The purpose of this article is to describe and explain the Platform and its potential for readers of our journal, whether they are in a member state or elsewhere. We shall do so by an account of its origins and functions within the Council of Europe in the first instance. It is important to do this since we do not want to imply that the Platform makes 'universalist' claims. For readers in other continents with other educational traditions, the Platform may serve as a guide to the European education 'garden' and, as a founding-father of Comparative Education stated from the first, one cannot pluck a plant from one garden and expect it to grow in another (Sadler, 1900;1964).

Nonetheless, visiting other people's gardens helps us to look afresh at our own and consider if we want to cultivate new varieties of our existing traditional plants.

## Origins and Development

Many readers will be aware of the concept of plurilingualism from the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001,[CEFR]), and more recently, from the *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020, [CV]). The CEFR focuses on modern foreign languages (or, in French, the other official languages of the Council of Europe,). It does so because the learning of foreign languages was seen, from the early years of the founding of the CoE in 1949, as crucial to the success of this new attempt to bring together in peace the countries and nations of Europe which had a history of internecine wars. The citizens of Europe should be able to speak to each other. The CEFR, with the CV, is an instrument which enables those professionally engaged with language teaching in the member states to communicate and cooperate with each other. One aspect of this is to establish a shared understanding of what learners need to be able to do with a foreign language and of how to assess the level of competence they have. The creation of six 'levels' to describe competence became the best-known element of the CEFR.

In the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) and the CV (Council of Europe ,2020), plurilingualism is described as a 'single interrelated repertoire' of languages which plurilingual people have. In practice and in the discourse of the CEFR and CV, the focus is on the 'foreign' languages in this repertoire because of the history of the CoE as mentioned above. After the publication of the CEFR in 2001, reflection turned towards the presence of plurilingual people's first language(s) or 'mother tongue(s)' in their repertoire and to how educational institutions - particularly schools and compulsory schooling - should help children and young people to use their first language(s). The project which took this thinking forward and led to the creation of the Platform began in 2005 and ended in 2015, but the products of the project are still very much alive.

The main purpose of the project and, ultimately, the Platform was similar to that of the CEFR, i.e. to allow professionals concerned with language and all languages in education to communicate and cooperate. It was decided that a platform would be more appropriate than a single book - as had been the case for the CEFR - because the issues would be more complex and better catered for in a platform. For it would allow access from different starting points whilst showing relationships among the parts. A platform also allows work to be more easily reviewed and augmented over time.

The inclusion of the word 'intercultural' was a change from the reference to 'pluriculturalism' in the CEFR. Pluriculturalism as a concept was not as thoroughly developed in the CEFR as plurilingualism. In the years immediately before and after the publication of the CEFR, it was argued that a pluricultural person is someone who belongs to and identifies with more than one social group - with an emphasis on language groups - and the culture shared in the group, but that schools should focus on the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to overcome difficulties people of different languacultural groups might have in communicating and cooperating. The final defining description of 'Plurilingual and Intercultural Education' (hereafter PIE) - arrived at over the course of the project - is as follows:

> Access to education and success at school depends heavily on language competences. Some pupils may be disadvantaged as soon as they start school because their competences do not match the school's expectations: children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children from migrant families, or children whose first language is a regional language. But all, whatever their language repertoire, must learn to communicate in school. A command of the language(s) of schooling is vital to success at school and social advancement.

> One major challenge for education systems is to give learners, during their school education, language and intercultural competences which will enable them to operate effectively as citizens, acquire knowledge and develop open attitudes to otherness: this vision of the teaching of languages and cultures is referred to as *plurilingual and intercultural education*.

> https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/the-founding-principles-of-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education

The conceptualisation of PIE will be taken up in detail below. This definition is accompanied by a statement of the 'founding principles':

> *Plurilingual and intercultural education is guided by the following founding principles:*
> *recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity* as guaranteed by Council of Europe conventions;
> *everyone's right to use their language varieties as a medium of communication,* a vehicle for learning and a means of expressing their affiliations;
> *every learner's right to gain experience and achieve a command of languages* (language of schooling, first language, foreign language, etc) and the related cultural dimensions according to their personal needs and expectations, be they cognitive, social, aesthetic or affective, so as to be able to develop the necessary competences in other languages by themselves after leaving school;
> *the centrality of human dialogue*, which depends essentially on languages. The experience of otherness through languages and the cultures they carry is the precondition (necessary but not sufficient) for intercultural understanding and mutual acceptance.

The presence in two of the principles of the word 'right' reflects the wider role of the CoE in promoting human rights, especially through the European Court of Human Rights (https://www.echr.coe.int ).

The significance of the Platform and its purposes was recognised in a Recommendation of the CoE's Committee of Ministers to member states 'on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success'.

The Recommendation locates the issues raised in the context of a number of assertions of the right to education at European and global levels, in particular it notes the importance of language and:

- that the right to education can only be fully exercised if the learners master the specific linguistic rules that are applied in schools and are necessary for access to knowledge;

- that such linguistic competences are one of the factors in educational success and that they are a prerequisite for undertaking further qualifying academic or vocational education and training, and therefore important for participation in society and sustainable inclusion;
- that some learners may be disadvantaged vis-à-vis mastery of these linguistic competences because of social and linguistic inequalities (Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers)

https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c6105

In this way, the outcomes of the project became the policy of the CoE.

## Quality education and *Bildung*

The Council of Europe commitment to quality education carries the implication that it is not enough for public authorities to discharge their responsibilities by making minimal provision. Instead the education provided must be fit for purpose, taking account of the complex demands and challenges of modern societies. The education provided must be inclusive and of sufficient quality for everyone; this, according to the Council of Europe, is a matter of individual justice as well as the best possible use of societal resources.

As stated in the Recommendation quoted above, it is clear that proficiency in language is important for quality education as it is the primary means of communication, and the central medium of teaching and learning. It is widely acknowledged and reflected in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, p. 26) that the ability to read, write, speak (including both 'spoken interaction' and 'spoken production') and listen are key to learning in all subjects and thus to providing access to the curriculum. Language is moreover the predominant means by which learners demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, and it is central to most formal assessment. This much is self-evidently true. However, underlying the approach embodied in the Platform is the view that the case for the importance of language needs to go further. It needs to recognise the wider role of language beyond communication in relation to learning, identity formation and values.

For, if language is viewed as being only about communication, there is a danger that language is viewed in a narrow, functional way as a disembodied tool for getting things done, as a transparent medium that is simply a means to an end. It is all too easy to take language for granted, to assume that as long as there is provision for language teaching somewhere in the curriculum, then that is enough. A central thrust of the Platform project is to recognise that in order to meet the goal of quality education provision, the full role of language needs to be acknowledged, and all the different aspects of language in an education context need to be thought about, acted upon, and viewed as an integrated whole, and this involves changes in pedagogy and curricula.

The role of the teacher has become increasingly complex in the modern era. In place of traditional classrooms with authoritarian teachers and passive learners the emphasis is now on engaging interest, motivating pupils, relating new learning to personal experience and presenting new content in exciting ways. Learning is no longer seen as simply acquiring knowledge but rather a matter of developing understanding, insight and the ability to be critical. Similarly, meaning is no longer seen as being transferred from teacher to learner in a simple way but rather negotiated and constructed in context through active learning. This means that using language, including in exploratory talk, is key to building concepts, and the Platform embraces constructivist views that place emphasis on the use of language by the learner in concept formation, making meaning and cognitive growth.

The thinking underlying the Platform also recognises the close integration of language and values, and this becomes clearer when language is seen as central to how learners formulate new perspectives and make sense of the world. The concept of *Bildung* (from the German education tradition) is helpful here to represent the vision of education goals underlying the project. The word has no clear equivalent in English but is often translated as 'formation' or even just 'education', although it is generally thought that these terms do not capture its full meaning. *Bildung* embodies both notions of 'development from within' and the idea of 'formation through external influences'. It has a controversial history as it was at one time criticised because it was associated with

acquisition of high culture. However, in its contemporary formulation, *Bildung* represents a rich view of what education should entail, including notions of learning, personal growth, self-development and critical reflection. It is also associated with notions of moral and emotional growth, without excluding the importance of acquiring knowledge that is necessary to operate in, and contribute to society.

It is not a matter of recommending one use of language over another (e.g. that the term '*Bildung'* should be used rather than 'learning'). The concept of 'learning' may be appropriate to capture the broad and inclusive view of the goals of education, as long as it is defined widely enough. However the concept of 'learning', if viewed too narrowly, may lead to a reductive and technicist interpretation of quality education as being only about achievement measured by tests. It is a matter not of prescribing terms but of being alert to the ways in which uses of language can narrow perception. The wider and more integrated view of knowledge and learning that extends beyond the acquisition of propositions, embraces dialogic approaches to teaching and includes the development of values and attitudes.

The principles that underpin this approach to the development of the Platform have often been ignored in the teaching of language and languages in school. They include recognising: that language education is not neutral but underpinned by values; that language in the whole curriculum should never be taken for granted; that the initial emphasis should be on what learners have achieved in language rather than on what they cannot do; that the teaching of language should be formulated and structured to support vulnerable learners; that language elements in the curriculum need to be seen not in isolation but in an integrated, holistic way. These principles, seen in the context of plurilingual and intercultural education, informed the way the Platform was operationalised.

## Overview of the Platform

The Platform was conceived as a dynamic and flexible instrument rather than as a static document. The aim was to make available a variety of documents that would serve as a stimulus to critical reflection on existing policy, as an inspiration to new approaches, and as a focus for sharing good practice. The Platform was intended primarily to support curriculum designers, teachers and other professionals in the compulsory school context in raising achievement in language. It was intended to create more transparency and communication but it was not intended to impose any kind of policy or practice – that is not the purpose of the Council of Europe's work.

The use of a website as the primary means of presentation was intended to serve a number of purposes.

- flexible presentation of issues and material, reflecting the way the different topics interrelate
- opportunity for users of the Platform to access those aspects which are of particular relevance
- scope for the complexity of the issues to be explored in more depth through further hyperlinks, without making key sections of the document overly complex and inaccessible
- opportunity for sharing of research and resources as these became available
- opportunity for users of the Platform to shape its development and progress through feedback and further contributions.

The Platform was structured in six sections to address different aspects of language education with links to a variety of relevant documents and resources.

*The learner and the languages present in the school.* This section presents the values underpinning the project, particularly those related to plurilingual and intercultural education. It addresses key principles and theoretical perspectives, as well as practical approaches. Emphasis is placed on the importance of language in pursuit of quality education as a right.

*The languages of schooling.* The term 'language(s) of schooling' denotes the languages used for teaching the school subjects and for the functioning of schools. The term embraces two key components: 'language as

subject' and 'language in other subjects'. There are cases, where several different languages comprise the 'languages of schooling' when, for example, there are two or more official languages or in contexts where a minority language and a state language are simultaneously or successively languages of schooling.

*Language as subject.* The term 'language as subject' was adopted to refer to the teaching of what has in the past been referred to as 'mother tongue' teaching. However the term 'language as subject' was used to recognise that, for many learners, the language taught as subject is not necessarily their first language. The documents in this section emphasise the importance of viewing language as subject not in isolation but in relation to other aspects of language education as presented in the Platform. It also recognises that many aspects of language as subject, including its aims, content and teaching approaches, are contested.

*Foreign languages - modern and classical.* This section builds on the work of the CEFR. It addresses the humanistic and utilitarian purposes of foreign language teaching in the context of plurilingual and intercultural education. It includes papers on the aims of language teaching, the use of portfolios in assessment, and other language policy programme resources (e.g. banks of descriptors, tools for the creation of language policies). There are also links to The European Centre for Modern Languages (a Council of Europe institution aimed at encouraging excellence and innovation in language teaching: www.ecml.at ).

*Language in other subjects.* The documents in this section address the importance of language in all subjects. Teachers of all subjects deal with language all the time but in this context language can easily be taken for granted. The documents argue that learners should be supported in all subjects in the use of language, and explore the practical implications for the classroom. It is argued that, when teachers and pupils become more consciously aware of aspects of language in the classroom, teaching and learning will improve and education provision is likely to become more equitable.

*Regional minority and migration languages.* This section of the Platform deals with the languages of minorities and of migrants in education systems. The term 'regional or minority languages' is used to refer to indigenous languages traditionally used by a minority group over a long period within a country, to non-territorial languages (e.g. Romani) and sign languages. 'Migrant languages' is used to refer to the first languages/mother tongues of migrant children, in which they may have varying degrees of proficiency depending on the extent of use and support for these languages.

*Curricula and evaluation.* This section includes reference texts and practical tools to support the creation of curricula (e.g. the *Guide for the Development and Implementation of Curricula for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education* https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/guide-for-the-development-and-implementation-of-curricula-for-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education ). The documents on assessment and evaluation include various papers and reference documents aimed at supporting the development of policy in this area (e.g. the use of descriptors, assessment in plurilingual and intercultural education).

**Some Key Documents on the Platform**

*The concepts and realisation of PIE: Plurilingual and Intercultural Education as a Right*

The principal concepts of PIE are discussed in several documents in the section 'The learner and the languages present in school' https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/the-learner-and-the-languages#{%2228069503%22:[4]} , and each paper is summarised on this web page to facilitate an overview. The documents are relatively short, being about ten pages long.

*Plurilingual and intercultural education as a project* is an introduction to the concept and, in a section defining PIE anticipates misunderstandings and emphasises that it is not a 'revolution' but a development from what exists; nor is it only for a privileged elite seeking distinction through mastery of language but is fundamentally inclusive; nor is it a new methodology for language teaching but a change in perspective on languages:

In fact plurilingual and intercultural education is above all distinctive with respect to its purposes, which are the fundamental rights of each learner, based on values which guarantee his/her education as an individual and as a citizen.

There are also documents discussing the feasibility and practicalities of PIE, with possible scenarios for curriculum development, but here we take up again the question of rights.

The document *Plurilingual and Intercultural Education as a Right* https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/-/plurilingual-and-intercultural-education-as-a-right-2009- emphasizes that there are numerous international statements and charters in which the rights of the child and language rights are declared and recommended. In the context of schooling, it is the right of children and young people to education - and, we would add, to good quality education - which requires a shift of perspective with the central focus on the individual, albeit with full acknowledgment of the needs and aims of societies to ensure their good functioning and inclusion of all their members.

This means that the starting point is the plurilingual repertoire of languages and language varieties which a child brings to school and the importance of enriching and developing that repertoire. Children need opportunities to access the official, main language - sometimes languages - of schooling if it is not already part of their repertoire, to acquire foreign languages, and to gain enrichment of other languages not present in the curriculum which they have begun to acquire before schooling begins and continue to use in parallel to their lives in school. An important dimension of this - often unrecognised or forgotten - is the acquisition of the language of school subjects: the specific discourses, genres and terminology of school subjects such as 'geography' or 'chemistry'. All of this is to be seen in the context of 'general language rights' where:

> the school as a whole, rather than individual subjects, is responsible for ensuring that they [general language rights] are respected. The emphasis here is on the language aspects, but particular attention must also be paid to the cultural origins, practices and representations of pupils and their environment, in accordance with the values and principles of an approach to education that is concerned with human rights, equality of opportunity, inclusion and social cohesion. (p. 8)

The document explains how this notion of language rights in education has specific implications across the curriculum, for example in the teaching of 'language as a subject', e.g. the subject 'Français' (French) in schools in France or Persian in Iran or Turkish in Turkey. It is however with respect to the language rights in other subjects, where learning always takes place through language, that PIE has a particularly significant role to play, and involves the notion of 'entitlement'. Pupils are entitled to:
- understanding of the linguistic and semiotic dimensions of any subject and of all subject teaching;
- understanding of the relationships between the common language and specific languages;
- understanding of each subject's specific text genres and communication schemata and the language characteristics of the operations - often transversal- applied to these subjects, such as observation, argumentation, explanation, exemplification, experiment, reasoning, specific forms of rhetoric and demonstration;
- active and reflective familiarity with these genres, schemata and operations, in terms of both their specifically subject-related aspects and possible transversal elements (p. 9)

Crucially, these are capacities which are fundamental to learners' educational success and to their being able to 'meet the school's expectations, both in its ordinary functioning and in the establishment of knowledge' (p. 9). One interpretation which can be put on this is that pupils are entitled to teaching which ensures they acquire all that is needed linguistically to understand what is taught in the subjects, that they must receive the linguistic education which allows them to access school subjects.

In discussions during the project, the team considered whether it would be possible and desirable to specify competence levels for the language of schooling, and which levels pupils should be entitled to reach - with the

support from targeted teaching - by the end of primary and lower secondary schooling. In other words, schools would be obliged to take responsibility for ensuring the competences needed in the next stage of education were acquired before it began. This discussion did not lead to specifications but remains an important issue.

## Languages in Other Subjects

The importance of language in all subjects is addressed in *A Handbook for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training* https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/a-handbook-for-curriculum-development-and-teacher-training.-the-language-dimension-in-all-subjects. This document seeks to clarify the theoretical perspectives underlying the need for support in language education in all subjects and provides suggestions for developing policy alongside practical examples drawn from the classroom.

Schools have always recognised that achievement in education depends to a large degree on developing competence in language, and have sought to ensure that learners have a sufficient command of language in order to ensure success. However the teaching of language has often been seen just as a subject on its own and not as an important element across all subjects. Even when language has been acknowledged as a factor in the learning of all subjects, it has tended to be treated in a narrow way, focusing primarily on vocabulary acquisition, spelling, punctuation and grammar in the texts of a particular subject such as chemistry. Proficiency in these skills is not unimportant but represents only one small aspect of what developing language for subject teaching and learning entails. The *Handbook* makes the case that teachers of all subjects need to go further and recognise the different ways language is used in the classroom and, in particular, the vital role language plays in learning and understanding subject content.

The term 'academic language' helps to convey the key elements of what is required in the classroom for learning subjects. This term refers to the language characteristics of the school subjects and the aspects of language proficiency that are valued and required by the school. These go beyond the spontaneous and generally informal language used in everyday social life. Students need to be able to use language not just for these informal purposes but also for learning subject content, for expressing their understanding and for interacting with others about the meaning and implications of what they learn. Academic language is more specialized, and tends to have some of the following characteristics: higher frequency of longer, complex sentences; impersonal statements and passive voice; abstract terms and figurative expressions. Texts formulated in academic language tend to be more precise, explicit, detached and structured. The language used for teaching and learning purposes (the language of schooling) will in practice be a combination of informal language uses, content language (the more technical language of the subject) and academic language. In practice these three categories will not be entirely distinct. This can result in the mistaken assumption that the acquisition of academic language will occur naturally and without intervention by the teacher.

The development of policy at the school level is important, as well as at regional and national level. In the school context it is particularly important to see policy development as a constant process of dialogue and shared understanding, not just as the writing of a static document. Some of the early, historical attempts to develop language in other subjects (e.g. DES, 1975) resulted in the formation of a written 'language policy' that had little impact on actual practice. A written document may, however, be helpful as a focus for coordinating an approach to language education in a school. Perhaps 'language policy' is the wrong term if it simply means a general statement of goals and values, important though those are. What is required is a policy/working document that seeks to coordinate the approach to language education in a school. The *Handbook* provides a list of possible items that might be included in a school language policy document.

The *Handbook* also provides practical examples from the classroom. To this end, it is helpful for the broad concept 'language' to be broken down into categories that have a useful practical application. For example the key term 'genre' provides one format for helping subject teachers to know how they might approach the development of language in their subject. When students are asked to write up an account of a lesson (an experiment in science, an outside visit in geography, a drama presentation in language as subject) they may be

left confused if no further information is provided on the type/category of writing they are meant to use, e.g. report, log, personal reflection, etc. The term 'genre' is useful in this context because it directs attention to the type/category of writing or speaking that is required; it points to the fact that certain texts share common features and can thus be grouped together. This is beneficial for subject teachers because it can assist them in setting a writing or an oral task with more detail of what is required, and in determining what sorts of help students might require to complete it. It also helps the students themselves to develop knowledge about what type of writing is needed for different contexts. Such knowledge is also important when approaching reading because it helps to know what type of text is being dealt with. For example, a different emphasis in reading strategies may be helpful when faced with a magazine article (browsing, reading visual clues) or a technical report (engaging prior knowledge, using knowledge of the likely structure, focusing on detail).

The *Handbook* overall makes the argument that one of the ways that education authorities, schools, and teacher trainers can respond to the challenge of improving standards is through the implementation of policies and practices that take seriously the language dimension in all subjects.

## Vulnerable Learners And The Children Of Migration

There are several papers on the issues which affect vulnerable learners, a category which may include children of migration https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/languages-of-schooling. Indeed, although we must be careful not to categorise all children of migration as being in need of help with language and learning, this group draws particular attention. It is however important to remember that it is socioeconomic status - whatever the origins of children - that is most strongly related to all school success or lack of it, as indicated in the paper *Language(s) of schooling: focusing on vulnerable learners* (p. 6) where mathematical competence is the focus but is a proxy for general educational success.

The philosophy and recommendations in PIE emphasize that all the languages present in a school should be facilitated and developed, not least those which are present but invisible because spoken by children and young people outside school but hidden by them while at school. It is equally emphasized that the language through which children learn - in all parts of the curriculum, whether designated as subjects or as topics or themes - is crucial. It is the dominant semiotic system for learning and it is usually the dominant language in society at large, although not always. Polish in Poland or French in France are dominant in schools and their respective societies, but regional and minority languages are often the language of learning, for example German in the German minority schools in Denmark.

Whatever their origins, vulnerable learners have difficulty in using the dominant school language for learning, and it is the responsibility of schools to ensure they overcome this difficulty. The paper *Language of schooling: focusing on vulnerable learners* analyses the nature of the difficulty. Although the authors recognise that language is used in schools for other functions - informal peer group interaction, and administration and communication with parents - it is the learners' "ability to cope with the specific patterns of classroom language use" which is crucial for children's educational progress and for their integration as active citizens in society.
Teachers are the key. They need to understand the role of language in learning and be able to take this into account in their pedagogical approach, whatever their subject, be it history or mathematics, or any other. All teachers are potentially teachers of language and responsible for the linguistic competence of their learners as a prerequisite for, and integrated with, learning in their subject. This may surprise teachers of subjects which are sometimes unfortunately referred to as 'non-language', because even if they recognise the significance of language in learning, they may see this as the responsibility of 'language specialists', in particular those who teach the subject 'French' in France or 'Polish' in Poland, etc. The authors argue however that this view cannot be to the advantage of learners, that responsibility for language is a cross-curricular matter.

This paper, and others found through the link indicated above, not only analyses the problems of vulnerable learners, but proposes solutions. It locates 'language for education in non-language subjects' in the larger context

of education for and in all the languages in the school, including foreign and second languages and the subject 'French', 'Polish' (i.e. 'language as subject'). It can serve as a manual for teachers – and can be used in teacher education - since it provides detailed analyses and solutions, and complements the *Handbook* mentioned above in the section on languages in other subjects.

Ultimately the specific problems experienced by vulnerable learners are not fundamentally different from those of all learners acquiring the language of learning, but with the significant difference that the factors in their background - socio-economic status, migration, family language, *inter alia* - are more powerful and need to be counterbalanced by particular attention from schools and teachers.

## Relationships among Language Subjects - The Aims of Language Teaching and Learning

The paper *The Aims of Language Teaching and Learning* argues that the traditional way of thinking about the aims of language as subject and foreign language teaching needs to be re-considered. The traditional view ascribes narrow, utilitarian aims to foreign language teaching but sees language as subject as making an important contribution to personal and social development. In the latter context language is seen as having a key role in cognitive development, affective learning and identity formation; language as subject, therefore, has a key role in relation to the vision of education expressed in the notion of *Bildung*. Through the initial acquisition of the first language, fostered subsequently in formal education, students develop the sort of character, moral insight and maturation embedded in this concept. In contrast foreign language learning has been viewed as having more functional aims. The paper expresses this mistaken perception of the difference between these two language subjects in very stark terms: students have developed and are developing as human beings through their first language; by acquiring a foreign language they are developing the skill to do in a foreign language what they are already able to do in their first language.

One of the problems underlying this view is the tacit assumption that learning in language as subject is equivalent to first language acquisition. In the modern globalised world, with more immigration and changes in national boundaries, language as subject is for a large number of learners not their first language. This means that language as subject teachers need to be aware of the potential diversity in the classroom and sensitive to learners' proficiency in the language(s) of schooling. This is one reason why the stark contrast between the aims of language as subject and foreign language teaching needs to be challenged, but it is not the only reason.

The argument is also made in the paper that the traditional conception embodies a very reductive view of the aims of foreign language learning when these are seen in purely functional terms, as being only about the acquisition of narrowly defined knowledge and skills. A more contemporary view recognises that foreign language learning is also about the development of identity through intercultural understanding. There are also benefits from foreign language learning that go beyond simply giving learners a tool for communicating through a different language. These include enhanced awareness of and improved competence in their first language, increased potential for enriching cultural experiences, development of cognitive processes, increased self-confidence and self-awareness. Thus the aims of language as subject and foreign language learning are aligned more closely and in particular ways more than has often been thought.

The emphasis on the differences between the aims of these language subjects tended to arise when the approach to curriculum planning took the individual subjects as the starting point rather than a broader vision of what education should entail. In the latter approach the question becomes not just 'what are the aims of this subject?' but rather 'how does this subject contribute to the overarching aims of education?' The plurilingual and intercultural framework provides a unifying vision for language education and suggests that an integrated approach to the teaching of the different subjects is needed where the links between them are identified and organised.

A further difficulty with the traditional view of aims is that the phrase 'first language acquisition' (which, as has been argued, is not equivalent to language as subject) can lead to the mistaken assumption that something homogeneous, clear and easily identified is being referred to. On the contrary, as pointed out in the paper

*Plurilingual and Intercultural Education as a Right,* all languages can be described as plural. There is much language variety within a specific language. One aspect of learning a language is understanding that one's own local dialect may not be easily understood in other parts of the country by speakers of 'the same' language particularly if combined with a different accent to that used for the standard language. Language changes over time and speakers of a specific language may vary in their ability to understand the language of previous generations and vice versa. Different language genres demand mastery of different language forms. Learners may be competent in some aspects of spoken language but not in others or they may be less competent with written forms. Thus the linear sequence of (i) 'learning a first language' and (ii) 'picking up a foreign language as another useful tool' that is implied in the traditional view is limited in the picture of language learning it presents.

The paper is careful not to deny the importance of the first language when determining educational policy. Some students for whom the language of schooling is not their first language may have acquired conversational language but may struggle with the academic language of subjects. There are challenges for policy developers when seeking to balance the need to promote national and international languages with a concern to preserve the teaching and learning of minority languages. It is important that pupils are made to feel that their first language is accepted and valued, whether or not it is formally taught in a school.

The paper makes the case that both language as subject and foreign language learning have aims that go beyond narrow concepts of communication and see language development as being inextricably tied with personal and moral growth. Both have the potential to contribute to the development of plurilingualism and interculturalism as educational aims.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Both the format and the content of the Platform were developed in accordance with key principles. The decision to opt for an electronic Platform reflected the complexity of the project but was also intended to foster participation, collaboration and dialogue. During the project's ten year span there were many seminars and seven intergovernmental conferences. At these events, representatives from the 47 participating countries were informed about the progress of the project. They were able to participate in discussions of the various topics, and provide feedback on how they thought the work should develop. This information was supplemented by a number of surveys which provided details about how language education was addressed in the different countries and regions. Although the individual papers were authored by either individuals or small groups of writers, the ideas were invariably presented in advance at the seminars and conferences, and were subject to discussion. Thus the project was conceived and evolved as a collaborative venture.

The key values underlying the content of the Platform (plurilingualism and interculturalism, equity and quality in education) did not emerge over the years of the project's duration but were there in some form from the start, as they derived from established Council of Europe values. What did develop during the project was a greater understanding of the role of language in promoting these values and the need for the different aspects of language education to be seen in an integrated way within the unifying goals of plurilingual and intercultural education. The inclusive vision of languages of education was symbolised by the Platform diagram with its various links between elements represented by the different boxes.

The process of understanding how the key values should be embodied in concrete ideas to contribute to policy and practice was not straightforward. This is because there are often tensions at the heart of the key decisions. For example the drive towards some uniformity in policy and in practice needs to be balanced with recognition of different needs in local contexts. There is also a tension in deciding whether describing language competences in systematic, structured stages runs the risk of promoting a mechanistic form of teaching that is closed and formulaic. Taking a balanced approach to such issues relied, in part, on a conception of language as an embodied, cultural phenomenon rather than a functional tool. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with tools

that enable practice such as lists of descriptors (there are examples from different countries on the Platform) as long as they are adopted in education programmes in accordance with key values.

The aim of the Platform was not to be prescriptive but to promote reflection. Similarly the intention in writing this paper is not to imply that the policies and practices described in the Platform make universal claims but, to return to the analogy used in the introduction, it is hoped that looking into another 'garden' will be informative and thought-provoking.

## References

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Council of Europe (2020). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume with New Descriptors*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

DES (1975) *A language for life (the Bullock Report)*. London: HMSO

Sadler, M. (1900/1964). G. Bereday, Documents: Sir Michael Sadler's 'Study of foreign systems of education', *Comparative Education Review*, (3), 307-314.

**Michael Byram** studied languages, wrote a PhD in Danish literature, and then taught French and German. He is Professor Emeritus at Durham University after working in teacher training and research on linguistic minorities and foreign language education. He has been Adviser to the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, and worked on Competences for Democratic Culture.

**Mike Fleming** is emeritus professor of education at the School of Education, Durham University.  He has a background in teaching Drama and English, and wide experience in teacher training and research. He worked on the Platform of Resources project at the Council of Europe and authored a number of the papers and booklets.