

Multilingualism

Steiner Waldorf schools have been committed to their pupils learning foreign languages since the founding of the first Waldorf School in 1919. The Astoria Waldorf school, based in Germany, began by teaching English and French to their pupils from Class 1 onwards. Since then experiencing several living languages and thus understanding diverse cultures has been at the core of Steiner Waldorf education.

Because of the extreme importance of language diversity for a democratic Europe the European Commission has set up advisory 'platforms' to promote communication by citizens in at least 2 other languages than their mother tongue. One platform, involving civil society, will pay special attention to better practices in the non-formal learning of languages. Non formal learning is that learning which occurs in a formal learning environment (like a kindergarten or conference) but is not formally recognised within a curriculum or syllabus. Formal learning is the classroom instruction prescribed by governments or national organisations.



By engaging in membership ECSWE took the opportunity to share its 90 years of experience in learning foreign languages, in formal and non-formal ways. This experience consists especially in applying early language immersion and operating more artistic processes with young children as well as involving them in 'real life' situations.

The EU language policy

Facing the rapid changes of globalisation, technological advances, ageing populations, and the enlargement of the EU itself the renewed



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

With the support of the Jean Monnet Programme of the European Union. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Social Agenda of the EU Commission of July 2008 set out a new approach for its language policy to Europe in order that its citizens can meet these challenges. Linguistic diversity is very important to avoid extra obstacles to living, working, entrepreneurship and communicating in the EU. The harmonious co-existence of many languages is essential for uniting in diversity, and is, as such, a cornerstone of the EU project.

To raise awareness of the value and opportunities of linguistic diversity as well as to encourage the removal of barriers to intercultural dialogue the EU Commission launched a Communication in September 2008 about "Multilingualism,(ML)- an asset for Europe and a shared commitment", which is aimed at bringing about a 'qualitative shift'.

An important tool in this potential change was the enabling of the Commission to work with government experts of the member states in the realm of formal educational systems by the 'open method of coordination', and set up a 'structured dialogue' with the stakeholders.

A 'Business Platform for Multilingualism' was also started. As an effect of the new Lisbon Treaty for encouraging more participation by the citizens, the Commission also launched a 'Civil society platform for multilingualism', on October 23rd 2009, consisting of interested organisations and presided over by Commissioner Leonard Orban (RO).

The task of this Civil Society platform is to advise the Commission specifically on the possibilities of non-formal learning. Multilingualism (ML) is also part of the cultural programme represented by the EU Cultural Forum. Together with 28 other European organisations ECSWE was accepted as a member of this platform. ECSWE is hoping to contribute to the practice of non formal language learning by, for example, promoting artistic activities, and encouraging living experiences of pupils abroad, as well as an age-appropriate early immersion in foreign languages (kindergarten, first class).

Meanwhile the new strategic framework for education and training of the Lisbon process (Education and Training (ET) 2020) defines education as a core process in which ML becomes more and more important. To highlight early modern language learning a special campaign was launched, called "Piccolingo", in order to raise awareness of parents and child carers. See: www.piccolingo.eu

Diversity

Linguistic diversity is a part of our shared heritage and a bridge to other countries and cultures. It is probably the most direct expression of culture and cultural identity. Each minority language adds an important dimension to our common backgrounds. Learning languages also explores new ways of thinking and creativity. It contributes to mutual understanding, and strengthens the life chances of citizens by giving them more employability and easier access to rights and local services. By providing a basis for intercultural dialogue ML also enhances solidarity and social cohesion.

To foster wider inclusiveness, wider employment and business opportunities concrete measures were also set up aimed at target groups such as migrant workers, monolingual citizens, school drop outs, senior citizens, adults not involved in life long learning, and pupils and adults in vocational education and training.

The increased linguistic diversity of the European Union is a source of benefits as well as new challenges. This diversity involves 500 million citizens, spread over 27 countries with 23 official languages. Together with the 'less widely spread' and regional and migrant languages this entails 60 living languages in the EU. Obstacles such as cultural barriers social division, fewer opportunities within the 'single market', inefficient cross-border administrative cooperation and difficult access to local services e.g. hospitals, courts, police, social centres, endanger the EU project and alienate its citizens.

The Civil Society Platform

This platform consists of a wide variety of civil activities:

- EU youth and childcare organisations (e.g. ISSA – International Step by Step Association)
- publishers, translators and language testers, writers, theatres, artists,
- adult educators (e.g. EAEA – European Association for the Education of Adults), vocational training (EFVET – European Forum for Vocational Education and Training)
- commercial TV companies and media, national language institutions (e.g. EUNIC – the European Union of National Institutions for Culture, the Goethe Institute, British Council) as well as organisations and foundations fostering literature, culture, and history (Euroclio)

ECSWE seems to be the only partner within the platform which is also involved in school education. The platform itself is responsible for defining its work programme, meetings and governance. Uwe Mohr director at the Goethe Institute in Brussels is the Chairman of the

platform. Being European umbrella structures the partners are asked to channel contributions up and down to their national members. The Commission gives some logistical support and with the help of the Directorate General for Education and Culture a web tool has been created for public as well as internal communication:

<http://forums.ec.europa.eu/civil-society-platform>

The Civil Society platform presented a bid for 2 years funding for the promotion of ML and intercultural dialogue outside formal education. Keywords are mobility and integration, but also early language learning. The key question however remains: how to reach and motivate the average citizen, the senior population, the migrants, and not just the experts.

The Steiner Waldorf approach

From the Steiner Waldorf perspective we stress the importance of an early start, with several foreign languages being taught from the beginning of formal learning. We encourage this because of the plasticity of the speech organs and the ready evocation of imagination at this age. We promote the inner experiencing of a living language by vivid perception and interaction and connecting with the underlying attitudes, values, and cultural heritage. Consequently we advise employing more native speaker teachers to undertake this role

We want to contribute to an open mindedness and 'linkedness' towards other cultures as well. We see languages not only as a tool for communication but also as 'artistic structures' reflecting the deeper nature of a people. Therefore as well as formal language learning we immerse our pupils in the arts, literature, theatre performances and choral music and view these as tools for learning.

Further developments

As a first phase the platform organised 4 working groups to exchange and prepare material on education, diversity, social inclusion, translation and terminology and on language planning. By the end of September we will have prepared a paper with firm recommendations on policies and implementation, alongside concrete examples of

good practices, and concrete actions. By October 2010 the Commission expects an Advisory Report.

The working group on Education in which ECSWE is involved has 10 participants. It is chaired by Cor van der Meer, director of Mercator/Frysk Academy. The working group has prepared a questionnaire and a template for presenting best practice examples to gather more material and views. One of the first results that arose is a major concern for the predominance of one or only a few national languages, e.g. English.

In 2011 the platform will also contribute to a EU Language Conference.

ML is not just important for its influence on mobility or employability. It is also important for the social dimension of the EU in the realms of social cohesion and sustainability and for helping to bind together the citizens of Europe and encouraging both tolerance and diversity.

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The views expressed are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of ECSWE.

ECSWE News is produced by C.Clouder and P.Sullivan.

Design by Fibonacci Designs | www.fibonacci-designs.co.uk