European perspectives on modern language learning

Contributions to the modern languages projects of the Council of Europe

Council of Europe Workshops 1990–1996 (conclusion)

John Trim Cambridge

Introduction

The papers published in this section are derived from the work of the Council of Europe in the promotion of the learning, teaching and assessment of modern languages and, in particular, its recently completed Modern Languages Project: *Language learning for European citizenship*. Many are based on papers presented by Animators to the series of eighteen workshops conducted between 1990 and 1996. Twelve of these workshops have been summarised in *Language Teaching* 29, 4 (October 1996). The remaining six, of which three were single workshops and three 'new-style' double workshops, are described below.

Workshop 13: *Language and culture awareness in language learning/teaching (L2 and L1) for the development of learner autonomy (age 11 – 18).*

This new-style workshop was hosted by Italy (13A) and Malta (13B), with the following themes: a) teaching and learning awareness of language, both as a system for the organisation of meaning and as a means of communication between individuals in society; b) teaching and learning cultural awareness, both as a means of intercultural knowledge and understanding and as a basis for international communication and co-operation; c) language awareness and cultural awareness as interrelated bases for autonomous language acquisition, learning and use in school and beyond; d) the relationship between teaching and learning L1 and L2 and their contribution to the development of learners' awareness of language and culture; e) the relative roles of learners and teachers in classroom interaction leading to the development of language and culture awareness and of learner autonomy; f) the theoretical and practical implications of the workshop findings for initial and in-service teacher training. Six inter-workshop projects were reported to Workshop B: 1. **The use of new technologies** (telematics and satellite TV) for promoting language and culture awareness as well as learner autonomy; 2. **Autonomy in teacher training** for learner autonomy; 3. Education towards learner autonomy in foreign language teaching in a **real classroom situation** (15 – 16+); 4. **Awareness of language, culture and learning** as means towards learner autonomy; 5. Strategies for the development of a systematic approach to **cultural**

awareness – this project's original participants generated three identifiable projects, one of which, the exchange of shoe boxes containing realia, involved school teachers, teacher trainers, inspectors, education officers and headteachers in 9 countries; 6. Towards **cultural sensitisation**.

Workshop 14: *'Landeskunde' in the teaching of German as a foreign language to adults and young people: Austria as an example of regional variety.*

This single workshop, hosted by Austria, was conducted and reported in German. Its aim was to provide participants with an opportunity first to experience and then to present and discuss socio-cultural aspects of language learning and teaching with special reference to contemporary German. In particular, attention was given to the Austrian contribution to the regionally diversified language and culture of the German-speaking peoples. The workshop themes were: a) 'learning strategies for dealing with foreign cultures'; b) 'socio-cultural aspects of foreign language teaching'; c) 'curricular aspects of regional studies in the 1990's'; d) 'literature and regional studies'; e) 'authentic non-fictional texts in regional studies'; f) 'regional studies begin in one's own country'.

Workshop 15: *The initial training of modern language teachers.*

This new-style workshop was held in the Czech Republic (15A) and Poland (15B). Its themes were: a) overall institutional frameworks for initial teacher training; b) core competences for modern language teachers including attitude formation and personal development (*savoir faire* and *savoir être*); c) matching the methodology of modern language teacher training to that of classroom teaching; d) helping teachers to develop pupils' learning strategies; e) new approaches to learning language through literature; f) establishing priorities for the core content of initial modern language (ML) teacher training; g) assessing and reporting the competences of student teachers and student profiles.

Inter-workshop R & D projects were carried out on: 1. Developing **reflective skills** in initial teacher education; 2. Foreign language learning and teaching: the common core; 3. The **role of the mentor** in the pre-service training of ML teachers; 4.

Teacher training for **intercultural competence** by the exchange of experience by pupils and student teachers, together with reports on individual projects from 15 countries. General conclusions and recommendations were drawn up by working groups based on the workshop themes.

Workshop 16: *The evaluation, selection and production of materials for the teaching of foreign languages in secondary education.*

This single workshop, hosted by Cyprus, aimed to: a) provide participants with an opportunity to share experiences, views and expertise on materials for foreign language teaching/learning (e.g. evaluation, selection, production, dissemination), as well as to exhibit locally produced materials; b) review and discuss procedures leading to identification of learner needs and learner profiles; c) identify evaluation criteria for course materials and specify areas not catered for by materials produced for global use; d) provide opportunities for participants to apply course materials evaluation criteria in the light of particular learner profiles and other factors; e) provide limited opportunities to participants to familiarise themselves with the process of producing supplementary materials to fill in identified gaps by adapting existing materials and/or using authentic sources; f) explore or discuss practical implications for the classroom of using the particular materials produced; g) draw conclusions regarding the content and methods of initial and in-service teacher training in the area of materials evaluation, selection and production/adaptation. The workshop covered in order: i) 'Setting parameters of teaching/learning situations'; ii) 'Criteria and procedures for the evaluation of language learning materials'; iii) 'From evaluation to selection'. The implications for teacher training, together with a slate of recommendations, were presented to a final plenary session.

Workshop 17: *The challenge of in-service training for foreign language teachers in primary schools.*

This single workshop, organised and hosted by Spain, dealt with the following aspects: a) the European intercultural dimension in teacher training; b) the psychological development of the child in relation to foreign language teaching/learning; c) aims, contents, approaches and strategies in in-service teacher training for primary school level. The Spanish in-service teacher training system was presented as a starting point for discussion in specialised groups, which led to the conclusions that, firstly, it is now time to introduce foreign language learning into the primary school curriculum for all children from the age of about 8 and to take steps progressively to lower the age of starting some forms of

sensitisation and learning appropriate to the cognitive, affective and sensory development of the child; secondly, that the implementation of this policy necessitates an active in-service training programme for existing staff, with a clear specification of realistic minimum requirements; and, thirdly, that whole-school policies are required for the development of communicative skills and cultural awareness in primary education and beyond.

Workshop 18: *The role of educational links and exchanges in modern language teaching and learning at secondary level (10/11 – 18/19).*

Workshop 18A was hosted by Norway and aimed to a) draw on experience in different member states in order to get an overview of current practice as developed in the field; b) explore different approaches to *'la pédagogie des échanges'* (i.e. educational aspects of the integration of links and exchanges into the school curriculum); c) identify needs and strategies for a successful use of exchanges in general secondary education and in vocationally-oriented language learning (VOLL). Following the presentations of aspects of these themes by the animators, five working groups were set up to consider possible projects which could be carried out in the one year before Workshop 18B would be held in Portugal.

Five projects crystallised and were planned and timetabled: a) 'Project "Primus" ', (a brochure to be used as a framework for use before, during and after an exchange, with 6 participants from Austria, Portugal and Norway); b) 'Whole-school policies for the integration of exchanges into the school curriculum' (4 participants from Belgium, France and the Netherlands); c) development and trialling of a module for in-service (and initial) teacher training with regard to *'pédagogie des échanges'* (6 participants from Austria, Germany, Moldova, Portugal and Switzerland); d) training language teachers for a multicultural Europe through the *'pédagogie des échanges'* (7 participants from Latvia, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland); e) 'The national tale and legend project' (12 participants from Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Russia and Switzerland). The results of these projects were presented to Workshop 18B, hosted by Portugal, which drew up proposals for the use, distribution, exchange and development of products developed, and made recommendations as to the role of educational links and exchanges in relation to the learning/teaching of modern languages, with particular regard to: i) the integration of educational links and exchanges into the curriculum; ii) methodological and educational aspects of school exchanges; iii) the transcultural dimension of school exchanges; and iv) the initial and in-service training of teachers and training of school heads appropriate to new challenges.

89

Conclusion

A Report has been or will be shortly issued by the Council of Europe for each of the above workshops. Each contains the names and addresses of the Director of Studies, animators and nationally nominated participants, from whom further information may be sought. For each 'new-style' workshop, separate reports are issued for the 'A' and 'B' workshops, as well as a Second Progress Report giving details of inter-workshop projects.

The papers by Daniel Coste and Brian North which follow have been produced in the context of a proposed Common European Framework for the description of language learning, teaching and assessment now in its Second Draft, thoroughly revised following an extensive field consultation. The Framework itself and an associated proposal for a European Language Portfolio will be the subject of a future issue.

Multilingual and multicultural competence and the role of school

Daniel Coste Ecole Normale Supérieure de Fontenay / Saint-Cloud, France (based on Coste, Moore, Zarate 1997)[1]

From communicative competence to plurilingual and pluricultural competence

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. The plurilingual and pluricultural competence, as defined here, is to be seen as simply giving a slightly different scope to the notion of communicative competence.

Whatever the original characteristics of the concept of communicative competence (Hymes emphasised the heterogeneity of linguistic communities and individual competences), it has developed, in the language teaching field, according to the model of the ideal native communicator: communicative competence is then characterised as adding to the strictly linguistic competence sociolinguistics and pragmatic abilities, knowledge and dispositions of speakers who are implicitly assumed to be monolingual natives or who are at least regarded as operating in circumstances of endolingual communication (i.e. communication involving persons deemed to have a perfect, homogenous command of the resources of the medium used, namely their first language). The objectives of foreign language learning tend therefore

to be described in reference to this native-speaker competence. The learner is not explicitly taken into account as a plurilingual communicator (able, for example, to call on the resources of his or her mother tongue or of another foreign language of which (s)he already has some knowledge).

It is to be noted as well that, even though, from an epistemic point of view, the concept of communicative competence is related to cultural anthropology, the dominant tendency in the language teaching and learning sector has been to interpret it in linguistic rather than cultural terms. The main stress has been placed more on the multiplicity of means of expressing language acts or functions taken as largely transversal, at the expense of the variety of cultural circumstances in which these functions are enacted and assume specific meanings. Intra- and inter-linguistic variation have been accorded greater importance than intra- and inter-cultural differentiation. With the probable exception of cases of what has been called 'intercultural pedagogy' and 'language awareness' experiences, a realisation of the multiplicity of cultures and the capacity to perceive, observe, objectivise this multiplicity, are only exceptionally considered in the teaching and learning project as far as the development of communicative competence is concerned.

Compared with the representation of the ideal communicator, plurilingual and pluricultural competence is usually uneven in one or more ways :

- generally greater proficiency in one language as compared with the others ;
- different profile of competences in one language as compared with others (for example, excellent speaking competence in two languages, but good writing competence in only one of them, with a third language being only mastered as regards written comprehension, without any real oral ability);

---

[1] This article is based on a study by the authors to be published in 1997: *Plurilingual and Multicultural Competence*, Council of Europe. Most of the categories used to characterise communication in this contribution are borrowed from the present version of 'Modern Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference', circulated in draft form by the Council of Europe.