

# Linguistic diversity and literacy in a global perspective (LDL)

A comparative look at practice in countries of Europe and Africa

Project description

Version 1.0

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*This project is carried out in cooperation with the ECML and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture ([www.bmbwk.gv.at](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at)), the Austrian UNESCO Commission ([www.unesco.at](http://www.unesco.at)), PRAESA ([www.uct.ac.za/depts/praesaa](http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/praesaa)), NACALCO and AfricAvenir ([www.africavenir.org](http://www.africavenir.org)).*

*The Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe will be represented at relevant meetings.*

## 1 CONTEXT

Literacy in the first languages (L1) and bi/multilingual approaches to literacy teaching in early childhood education are now widely accepted as the most effective ways of ensuring educational achievement for children and social cohesion in multilingual societies. This project is rooted in a commitment to linguistic and cultural diversity. Its multilingual and multicultural character makes it inherently transnational. The focus on the language learning of young children is wholly in keeping with the ECML priorities. Earlier work done in the area, especially by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and in Graz, concludes that early language learning can have a very positive effect on pupils in terms of language skills, positive attitudes to other languages and cultures and self-confidence.

The linguistic reality in Europe today is complex, with a range of situations requiring different policy responses. Plurality and linguistic diversity was the hallmark of life in Europe until the rise of the nation state in the nineteenth century, when considerable importance was attached to cultural and linguistic homogeneity. This is challenged today by the reality of migration. The promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity is crucial to any serious attempt to realise a truly internationally oriented education, which would equip children to think and operate globally, to deal effectively with linguistic and cultural diversity.

In this context the importance of literacy in the first language(s) is widely recognized. Nevertheless, teaching of multiple L1s still has a rather marginal position in the education systems. Whereas in some countries the responsibility for L1 teaching is within the state systems, in others it is left to the communities or to the countries of origin. In both cases there is a serious lack of adequate teaching material, especially for the languages of smaller migrant communities and for languages which are not state languages in the countries of origin (e.g. some African languages) as well as for non-territorial languages (e.g. Romani). With the exception of a few projects concerning the development of materials for the languages of larger migrant communities in Europe, the availability of literacy teaching material in L1 depends either on the availability of such material in the countries of origin or on local initiatives, the improvisation of teachers etc. Several initiatives promoting L1 teaching and more generally language awareness were taken up during the European Year of Languages in 2001. In non-European countries also, approaches to language learning in multilingual settings have developed which could be models for innovative approaches in Europe. Such innovative approaches to L1 literacy aiming at bi- and multilingual education as exist, are often not known beyond a local/national context.

Although literacy education in Africa – formal and informal and at adult and child levels – has been the focus of discussion for decades, little progress has been made in establishing habits and practices that root (multi)literacy development meaningfully into the day to day activities of many African language speaking communities. Therefore African institutions such as the ACALAN (African Academy of Languages) and the AU (African Union) stress the importance of using African languages as media and/or co-media of instruction.

Several language-related factors are an obstacle in the successful development of (multi)literacy at the primary school level:

- low status for many African languages in print
- virtually no development of a literature for children in African languages across the continent
- learning to read and write in school is often experienced in a foreign language, and often without books or appropriate learning materials.

A growing number of language in education and early literacy professionals on the African continent agree that there are two related and urgent challenges for literacy development:

- establishing the conditions for a reading culture to grow and flourish among families with young children;
- supporting and sustaining the development of mother-tongue-based bi/multilingual reading and writing practices in working-class and rural communities.

Some small but significant examples of materials development in South Africa and Cameroon can serve as the basis for future work. These have involved attempts to develop appropriate reading materials and to train teachers and other adults to use them effectively with children. In South Africa, the guiding principle for materials development has been to create a common core of materials available in mother tongue versions as well as in a lingua franca, in this case English. Children and their caregivers from various social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are thus exposed to the same material.

The Council of Europe's new document on language policy '*Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe. From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education*' (April 2003)<sup>1</sup> explicitly stresses the importance of plurilingual education and multiliteracy. Languages of migrants and lesser used languages are seen as an important resource. In the context of the ECML several projects focused on teaching and literacy in bilingual settings (e.g. Workshop 10/98) or on approaches to multiliteracy (Project 1.1.5 in the 1<sup>st</sup> medium term programme).

The project also falls within the framework of the UNESCO Literacy Decade 2003-2012 which supports L1 instruction, bi- and multilingual education and linguistic diversity in general as a means to promote social cohesion and intercultural understanding.

## **2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **General aims**

- To raise awareness, stimulate and encourage research in the field of materials development for L1 and multilingual education, including guidelines for materials development and work with such materials;
- to foster an intercultural dialogue and exchange of experience and developments between European and African countries;
- to examine the educational and cultural aspects of the management of mother-tongue literacy in African countries and of migrant/minority language literacy in European societies.

### **Specific objectives**

- To establish and/or strengthen a network of language education scholars and practitioners in Africa and Europe in the area of design and production of materials for mother-tongue based bi/multilingual education in primary schools
- to develop in the framework of the ECML a mother-tongue and multilingual literacy materials website linked to other relevant sites in Europe, Africa and elsewhere.
- to discuss guidelines on materials development for decision makers, multipliers, teacher trainers, text book authors and illustrators.

## **3 EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- Website with examples of practice and resources for experts, multipliers and teachers;
- a set of guidelines for materials developers and textbook authors.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Claude Beacco, Michael Byram, Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, Strasbourg

## 4 ACTION PLAN

**2004**

### January to June

- *Establish a coordination structure among the project team;*
- *exchange of experiences within the team;*
- *establish a bibliography on multiliteracy and materials development (publications, research reports, selected materials);*

### 4-5 June

#### **Expert meeting; aims:**

- to establish a detailed plan for the central workshop;
- to prepare a documentation for the workshop (evaluation of existing initiatives and examples of good practice);
- to set the basis for a website on literacy and materials development in the framework of the EMCL web site.

### June to April (2005)

*Compile the documentation for the central workshop (collection of further examples of good practice and other relevant documents); enlarge the network in European and African countries.*

**2005**

### 1-2 April

#### **Preparatory meeting:**

- preparation of the central workshop.

### 23-25 June

#### **Central workshop;**

Specific objectives: to gain an overview

- of expertise in materials development and relevant teaching strategies, as well as
- on examples of good practice in the field;
- discuss criteria for materials development.

#### **Profile of participants:**

Participants should be working in the field of linguistic diversity, and be familiar with teaching and learning issues for children who speak either regional and lesser used languages or more recently arrived minority languages. Participants should ideally have experience of bilingual approaches to the education of children between the ages of 3 and 14, in mainstream schools or in the voluntary sector. Familiarity with issues in early literacy learning would be an advantage, as, too, would an understanding of the situation of African-language-speaking children either in Europe or in Africa. Given the focus of the workshop on materials development, participants should be able to identify and bring with them examples of materials used in mother tongue teaching in their countries, particularly those which embody good practice.

**2006**

Spring

**Expert meeting:**

- finalisation of results for publication.

Persons involved: editorial team.

## **5 WORKING LANGUAGES**

The working languages of the project will be English and French.