



# Learning environments where modern languages flourish

## Abstract

### Introduction: aims and context

Languages are essential for interaction, to establish relations and to promote mutual understanding. Languages are also at the very heart of learning. We learn in a language and through a language. For all these reasons, languages are at the core of any school profile and its wider network. However, in most situations language education seems to be characterised by disconnections, i.e. there are gaps between formal, informal and non-formal education; the different levels of education do not interact; language diversity is seldom taken into account, and languages in schools, like other subject matters, tend not to be connected to one another.

Global projects **for and through languages** are needed to develop **interconnections** and set up **learning environments where modern languages flourish**.

### What is EOL?

In French EOL stands for *Environnements Optimisés pour et par les Langues*. It is an ECML action research project developed as part of the medium term programme *Languages at the heart of learning*, 2016-2019. EOL develops a **global, eco-systemic approach** to language education whose objective is to support the development of learning environments where modern languages flourish. The starting point towards a global approach to language education, which EOL wants to promote, is a widespread awareness of the role of languages for the promotion of **democratic citizenship** and **social cohesion**.

### EOL is holistic

EOL aims at revitalising language education and synchronizing **all levels of education** systems for and through languages: **a common vision for language education converges at the levels of** learning (nano), teaching (micro), managing schools (meso), guiding educational systems (macro), and fostering international education policies (supra). This vision of languages led to the creation of the EOL Matrix which embraces all levels and dimensions of language learning environments in a two dimensional table.

	NANO : learner	MICRO : class	MESO : schools	MACRO : system
<i>Operational dimension</i>	1.1. Supporting skills	1.2. Strengthening skills	1.3. Setting up operational school policy	1.4. Fostering global awareness
<i>Ethical dimension</i>	2.1. Sensitising learners	2.2. Evaluating and assessing	2.3. Setting up a whole-school policy	2.4. Ensuring and widening diversity
<i>Experience dimension</i>	3.1. Learning with others	3.2. Implementing a language sensitive approach	3.3. Developing international networks	3.4. Enhancing interconnections
<i>Curricula based dimension</i>	4.1. Valorising pathways	4.2. Interdisciplinarity	4.3. Ensuring cross curricular continuity	4.4. Promoting collective intelligence
<i>Existential dimension</i>	5.1. Enriching pathways	5.2. Using all learning fields	5.3. Exploring landscape	5.4. Building specific environment

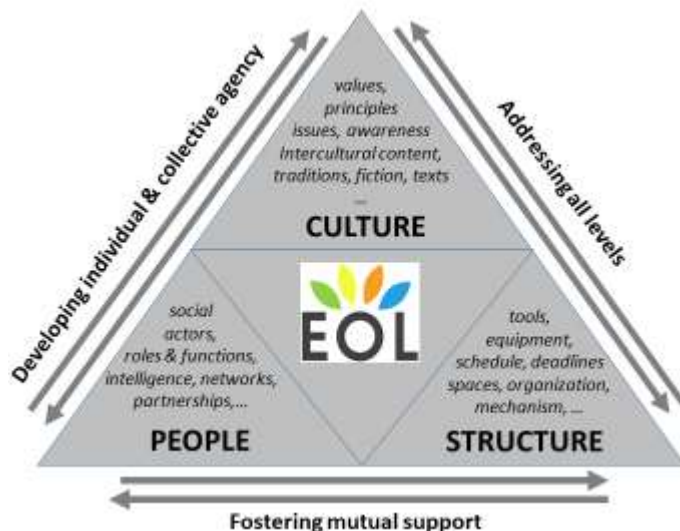
This is an output of the project “Learning environments where modern languages flourish” (2016-2019) of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). The ECML is a Council of Europe institution promoting excellence in language education in its member states.  
<http://www.ecml.at/Learningenvironments>



The matrix gives an overview of different fields and areas. By matching 4 environmental levels (nano, micro, meso, macro) with 5 dimensions of language learning, the matrix helps schools to identify their strengths and new opportunities. The matrix is a dynamic tool. It is connected to a glossary and to different tools and resources. It was tested and improved all the way through the 4 years of the EOL project.

The matrix is like a dashboard. Each box contains scaled descriptors, questionnaires and examples. The objective is not to make schools cover all the boxes but to help them to identify their strengths and set out their priorities. In the four-year project (2016/19) partner schools used the matrix to formulate their challenges and opportunities.

EOL encompasses all levels of education, helping schools to explore all factors which contribute to efficient language learning. From a conceptual point of view, EOL combines three constituents of learning environments: **culture** (aims, values, etc.), **structures** (all organisational components) and **people** (personal and professional development).



### EOL is symbiotic

Symbiosis combines **individual and collective agency** and offers **opportunities for mutual support**. With various tools and concrete resources, EOL helps stakeholders at all educational levels to design language learning environments. Symbiosis is assured if the three components, i.e. developing individual and collective agency, addressing all levels and fostering mutual support, work together as a system and not in isolation. The Triangle shows how these three features of symbiosis should be systematically linked together.

### From local projects to whole-school plans

EOL is a participative project where tools and resources are designed to help stakeholders find their own tailor-made solutions to local educational aims and issues. The more people (partner schools) get involved in processes (projects, events, curricula, etc.) of language education, the more chance there is to value plurilingual and intercultural education as a key for mutual understanding and shared citizenship.

- **Projects:**  
EOL has developed cooperation within a network of nearly one hundred European partner schools. With various tools, EOL helps stakeholders at all educational levels to design language learning environments by drawing on all their internal and external resources. Drawing on their full potential, these partner schools have developed a wide range of language projects.
- **Whole school action plans:**  
Single projects can represent an essential milestone in setting up language learning environments. TrEOL, a tool to start identifying strengths and priorities, together with further planning tools, guide stakeholders towards whole-school actions plans.

EOL presents a vision of a language friendly environment, encourages a strategic approach to language teaching and learning and provides tools and resources to all those who want to change their school into a

place where languages can flourish. Three main environmental models emerged from the cooperation with the partner schools.

### Quality indicators

Self-assessment is part of the project's global philosophy and contributes to the holistic ambition of EOL. The team set up a grid with 25 quality indicators which derive from the five dimensions of the matrix. Indicators can be used internally for the school and the school community but can also serve as labelling strategies for school authorities.

### EOL outcomes: what is there for me?

EOL tries to address the needs of students, specialists (language teachers, teacher educators and researchers) and non-specialists (parents, school principals, inspectors and decision makers). This is the main reason why three different outcomes are necessary: an informative one (website), one which is used for professional development (online training path) and one which is more in-depth (publication).

### Education policy

EOL offers new ways to support language and educational policies which take into account the real needs of stakeholders at all levels of education systems, valuing the role of each stakeholder within a reasoned approach to human ecology.

- EOL contributes to widening the **diversity** of foreign languages on offer in some partner schools and helps to develop support for home languages in various forms (clubs, projects, translanguaging, etc.);
- EOL, through its global approach, develops international and intercultural education and the linguistic dimension of all subjects **simultaneously**;
- EOL values the **complementarity** of education professions (teachers, teacher educators, school principals, inspectors and researchers) by setting up horizontal collaborations;
- EOL accelerates the **digitalisation** of education (digital development of schools, networking and online training).

### Conclusion: perspectives and innovative aspects of EOL

- EOL offers a **holistic** approach that takes into account all the levels of education (learning, teaching, managing schools and developing education systems) and encourages schools to develop sustainable connections between formal, informal and non-formal education.
- EOL is **participative**: its **versatile** concept allows schools to find new solutions adapted to local needs. Building on a network of European schools, the EOL team has developed a symbiotic method that values the role of languages in education. The resources developed by the partner schools illustrate the wide diversity of projects.
- EOL is **transferable**. The tools developed during the 4 years of the project (matrix, matrix scale, matrix questions, TrEOL, memos and indicators) have been brought together in an online training course which aims to help teachers and headteachers develop learning environments where modern languages flourish. This concept is transferable towards other domains such as democratic education, school innovation or science education.