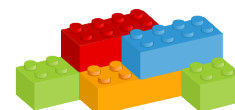# BUILDING BLOCKS FOR PLANNING LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE TEACHER EDUCATION:

2 – HOW CAN THE AIMS IN LEARNERS' CURRICULA INFORM LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE TEACHER EDUCATION?

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BLEICHENBACHER LUKAS

AND THE PROJECT TEAM

HOW CAN THE AIMS IN LEARNERS' CURRICULA INFORM LANGUAGE-SENSITIVE TEACHER EDUCATION?

What is the purpose of this Building block?

This Building block is concerned with how teacher educators' and (future) teachers' understanding of language-related aims described in learners' curricula can contribute to language-sensitive education. Such aims usually include the language-related competences of learners across the range of subjects, including languages, that they are studying at different target levels of education.

While teacher educators and curriculum planners for teacher education are likely to be more directly concerned with the competences of (future) teachers, and perhaps of teacher educators themselves, it is essential to review and plan teacher education with its intended outcomes in mind. These outcomes include the teachers' ability to help learners to develop the necessary language-related competences for education and for life. These competences are often described in course curricula for learners and in learner competence frameworks, so it is important for teacher educators to be fully aware of these competence descriptions where they exist.

Who is this Building block for?

- teacher educators and those organising professional development for practising teachers,
- curriculum planners for teacher education.

To use this Building block, some familiarity with language-sensitive education is recommended. Teacher educators or curriculum planners with little background in language education are invited to cooperate with colleagues who are more experienced in this area and to consult Building block 1.

The main objectives:

- to enable users to become acquainted with and reflect on descriptions of learners' language-related competences specified in learners' curricula by national and regional education authorities;
- to use the insights gained from discussing descriptions of language-related learner competences when planning language-sensitive teacher education modules or curricula.

CONTENTS

A. Introduction to learners' curricula

This Building block focuses on language-related competences in learners' curricula. If you would like more information and activities on curricula in general, and teacher education curricula in particular, we would encourage you to have a look at the first section of Building block 3, . The questions below can be used in a general warm-up discussion on the topic of learners' curricula.

Learners' curricula in your context

a) *In your context, which entity or persons decide on and write curricula for learners?*
b) *Have you been involved in the creation or design of learners' curricula yourself?*
c) *Are learners' curricula referred to prominently in modules in initial teacher education and professional development?*
d) *In your experience, how do the competences developed by learners correspond to those described in the learners' curriculum?*
   i. *Is evidence gathered (e.g. from studies) about learners' performance?*
   ii. *In the discourse of teachers, parents, media etc., are the competences that learners attain often described as higher or lower than intended?*

B. What kinds of language-related competences are expected of learners?

In the Buidling blocks resources, we use the term 'language-related competences' as an umbrella term for a range of competences that learners need to develop during their schooling and beyond, including language and communicative competences, language awareness, and intercultural competences.

Figure 1 below contains a brief overview of these competence domains and some of the aspects involved. The overview is intended as a quick entry point into the topic of language-related competences. In the overview, a distinction is made between three main areas:

i) Language and communicative competences. These are the competences related to the language(s) and varieties of language needed by learners in the learning of any subject, including language subjects.

ii) Language awareness. This category contains the metalinguistic competences that are associated with the learning of language subjects as well as other subjects.

iii) Further language-related competences. This is an open category that contains competences that are not typically considered to be language competences in a strict sense but are nevertheless strongly linked to language in different ways.
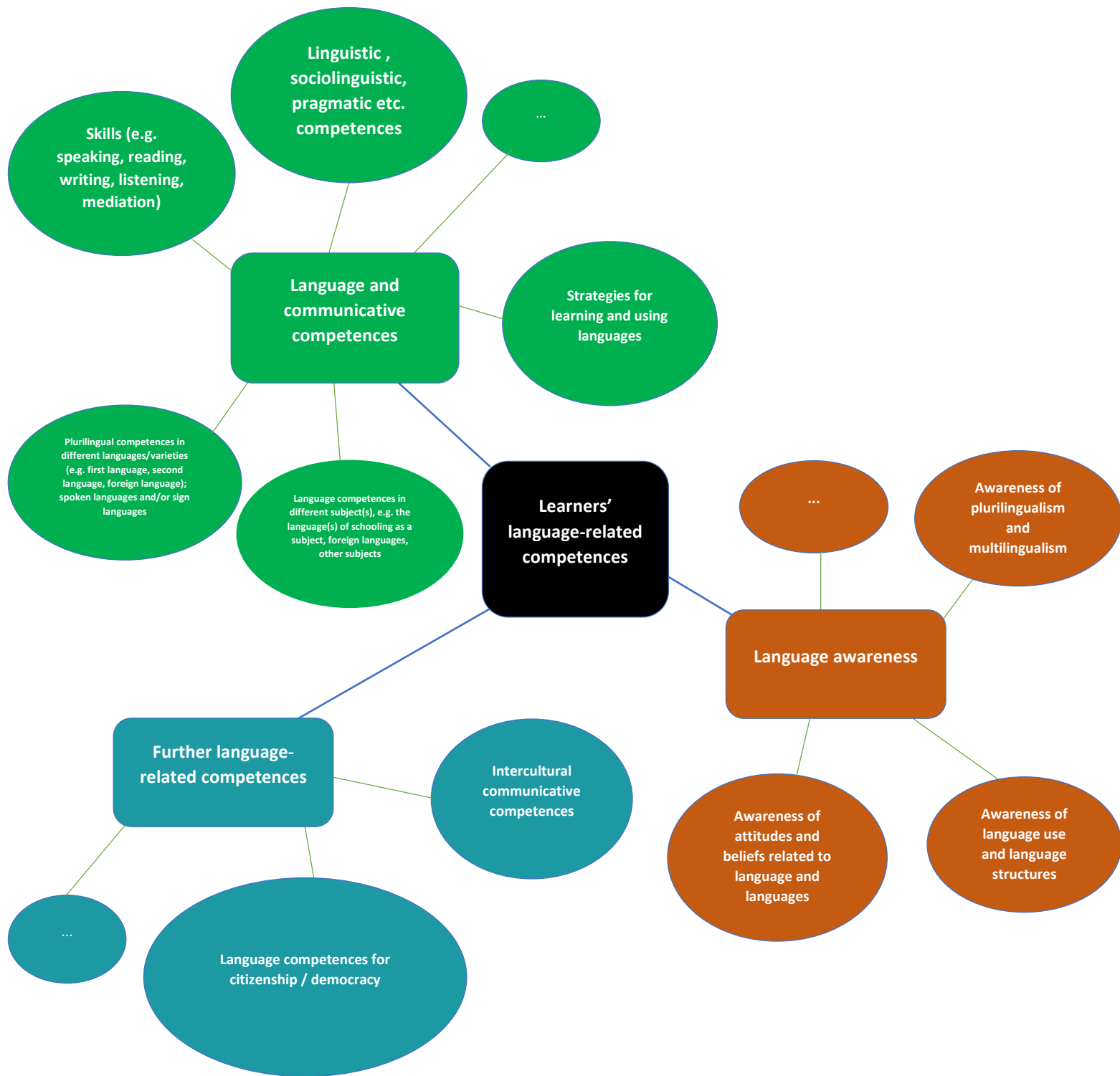
Figure 1: Learners' language-related competences

Read the different bubbles in Figure 1 above and reflect on the following questions:

- *Which language-related competences are you concerned with in your teacher education context?*
- *Does the figure cover the relevant language-related learner competences for your context, as represented in learners' curricula or related documents and instruments? If not, which ones would you add?*

Some of the language-related competences described above have been the focus of specific ECML and Council of Europe projects. A quick overview can be found here on the *Guide to Teacher Competences for Languages in Education* website.

General language and communicative competences, especially for foreign languages, are at the heartof the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA) features learner competences relevant to plurilingual and intercultural education. Language competences and language awareness for subjects other than languages are presented on two ECML websites, Language Skills for Successful Subject Learning and Developing Language Awareness in Subject Classes.

For more details on language competences for citizenship / democracy, please have a look at the last section of Building block 1 (*Language sensitivity in a broader context*).

C. Where can language-related learner competences be found in learners' curricula?

National and regional curricula differ widely in their attention to and presentation of language-related competences. For the full picture, it is useful to get an overview of the complete curricula that are in use for a specific domain of education.

a) A first obvious place to look is in the curricula for the language(s) of schooling as a subject and for foreign languages. They are likely to specify certain key language competences, and possibly also areas of language awareness and intercultural competence.

b) The language-related competences for other subjects (or all subjects) can be treated in different ways. They might appear in a general or introductory part of the full curriculum, and/or in the specific subject curricula.

c) Some curricula also have specific learning aims for learners of the language of schooling as a second language, e.g. for those learners who have a migration or minority language background. These learning aims can serve as an inspiration for other learners as well since subject-related academic language may also be challenging for some learners for whom the language of schooling is their first language.

d) In some cases, language-related competences for subjects other than language might not be described explicitly. In this case, you can try to pinpoint them in three main ways:

i.   You can analyse general or subject-specific learners' aims for competence descriptions that contain language-related aspects (for instance concrete references to oral or written coursework).

ii. You can study the formal assessment criteria used for a range of subject exams (especially high-stake ones) to ascertain which language competences (e.g. written or oral) are expected of successful learners.

iii. You can refer to competence descriptions in other curricula or international learner frameworks, as described in section B above.

D. Studying examples of learners' curricula for the language of schooling

TASK A

Read the specification *of language-related competences for students aged 11-14 in Northern Ireland on this webpage:* https://ccea.org.uk/key-stage-3/curriculum/communication

"Communication is one of the three Cross-Curricular Skills at the heart of the curriculum. Developing pupils' communication skills enables them to express themselves socially, emotionally and physically, develop as individuals, engage with others and contribute as members of society.

Teachers should give pupils opportunities to engage with and demonstrate communication skills. They should also have opportunities to transfer their knowledge about communication concepts and skills to real life and meaningful contexts across the curriculum.

The modes of communication include:

- Talking and Listening;
- Reading; and
- Writing.

Effective communication also includes non-verbal modes and engaging with a range of multimedia and ICT texts that may combine different modes. These modes are covered in a range of contexts across the curriculum.

Teachers of any subject can encourage pupils to become effective communicators by using a range of techniques, forms and media to convey information and ideas creatively and appropriately.

Across the curriculum, at a level appropriate to their ability, pupils should be enabled to develop skills in three modes of communication.

In Talking and Listening, pupils should be enabled to:

- listen to and take part in discussions, explanations, role-plays and presentations;
- contribute comments, ask questions and respond to others' points of view;
- communicate information, ideas, opinions, feelings and imaginings, using an expanding vocabulary;
- structure talk so that ideas can be understood by others;

- speak clearly and adapt ways of speaking to audience and situation; and
- use non-verbal methods to express ideas and engage with the listener.

In Reading, pupils should be enabled to:

- read a range of texts for information, ideas and enjoyment;
- use a range of strategies to read with increasing independence;
- find, select and use information from a range of sources;
- understand and explore ideas, events and features in texts; and
- use evidence from texts to explain opinions.

In Writing, pupils should be enabled to:

- talk about, plan and edit work;
- communicate information, meaning, feelings, imaginings and ideas in a clear and organised way;
- develop, express and present ideas in a variety of forms and formats, using traditional and digital resources, for different audiences and purposes; and
- write with increasing accuracy and proficiency."

Now reflect on the following questions.

a. Give examples of some of the language-related competences required <u>of teachers</u> to enable learners to develop the competences indicated in
   - speaking and listening
   - reading
   - writing.

a. Are the language-related competences specified for learners at age 11-14 in Northern Ireland also applicable for learners of the same age in your context? Are any additional competences required? If so, what are they?

b. In your experience, how well does teacher education in your context prepare future and practising teachers to meet curriculum requirements such as those illustrated in the Northern Irish curriculum? What changes, if any, in teacher education for teachers of any subject are needed to ensure that teachers are better able to meet the challenges implied?

For more details on teacher competences for language-sensitive education, please refer to Building block 6.

TASK B

Read the excerpt *from the language of schooling curriculum for Austrian Unterstufe learners, aged 11-14, reproduced below in German (with a translation into English) :*

„Deutsch Bildungs- und Lehraufgabe:

Der Deutschunterricht hat die Aufgabe, die Kommunikations- und Handlungsfähigkeit der Schülerinnen und Schüler durch Lernen mit und über Sprache zu fördern. Im Besonderen sollen die Schülerinnen und Schüler befähigt werden,

- mit Sprache Erfahrungen und Gedanken auszutauschen, Beziehungen zu gestalten und Interessen wahrzunehmen;
- Sachinformationen aufzunehmen, zu bearbeiten und zu vermitteln und sich mit Sachthemen auseinander zu setzen; –
- Ausdrucksformen von Texten und Medien und deren Wirkung zu verstehen sowie sprachliche Gestaltungsmittel kreativ einzusetzen.

Die Schülerinnen und Schüler sollen Einblicke in Struktur und Funktion von Sprache gewinnen. Der mündliche und schriftliche Sprachgebrauch soll frei von groben Verstößen gegen die Sprach- und Schreibrichtigkeit sein.

Der Deutschunterricht muss mit den anderen Unterrichtsgegenständen verknüpft gesehen werden. Er soll die sprachlichen Mittel sichern und erweitern, damit die Schülerinnen und Schüler sich über Sachthemen, über Beziehungen und über Sprache angemessen verständigen können. Der Deutschunterricht muss Schülerinnen und Schüler, für die Deutsch Zweit- (Dritt- oder Viert-)Sprache ist, im Anschluss an die Lern- und Lebenserfahrungen ihrer sprachlichen und kulturellen Sozialisation so fördern, dass damit eine grundlegende Voraussetzung für deren schulische und gesellschaftliche Integration geschaffen wird.

Die zuerst erworbene Sprache ist in hohem Maß Grundlage für den Erwerb einer Zweitsprache. Daher soll die Muttersprache beim Zweitspracherwerb nach Möglichkeit berücksichtigt werden."

Adapted translation:

"Educational and teaching aims for German

The aim of German lessons is to foster students' communication and interaction skills by learning through and about language. In particular, the students should be able to:
- use language to exchange experiences and ideas, to shape relationships and to become aware of one another's interests;
- gather, process and communicate factual information and deal with factual topics;
- understand the forms of expression used in texts and the media and their impact, as well as use tools for expressing themselves creatively.

Students should gain insights into the structure and function of language. Their use of oral and written German should be free of major linguistic or spelling errors. German lessons should be seen as intertwined with the other subjects taught. German lessons should secure and expand the range of linguistic means available to students so that they can communicate appropriately about factual topics, about relationships and about language itself.
In the case of students for whom German is a second (third or fourth) language, German lessons should support their linguistic and cultural socialization while taking account of their

previous experiences of learning and life so that these lessons provide a firm foundation for their integration into school life and (Austrian) society. A student's first language is to a great extent the basis for acquiring a second language. Whenever possible, students' first languages should be taken account of when they are learning [German as] a second language."

Now, reflect on the following questions.
   a. In your context, are the language-related competences required of teachers to enable learners to develop the competences indicated above different from those needed to meet the requirements of the Northern Ireland curriculum in task A above?
   b. How similar are the language-related competences specified in the Austrian curriculum to the competences required of learners of the same age in your context? What are the main differences?
   c. Thinking about the courses for (future) teachers of any subject that are taught in your teacher education context, which teacher competences are required for teachers to enable their learners to meet the requirements in the learner curriculum excerpts exemplified in tasks A and B? How can the attention given to these teacher competences be enhanced, if necessary?

For more detailed information on teacher competences, please refer to Building block 6.

E. Reflecting on language-related learner competences in one's own curriculum

   a. ***Take a page/excerpt from your national/regional curriculum (any subject such as mathematics, history, any language subject, etc.). Choose a target level/age group that you have worked with. Then analyse the list of subject-related competences and topics and discuss or reflect on the language-related competences the target level learners need in order to meet the curriculum requirements for the subject chosen in the following areas:***
   - *reading, listening, speaking, writing*
   - *language awareness*
   - *intercultural competences*
   - *other competences: which ones?*

   b. ***Make notes on the language-specific competences required for the subject you are focussing on (e.g. history).*** *You may want to focus on only one or a few areas or activities (e.g. reading and speaking, or plurilingual and intercultural competences). You can add these competences to Figure 2 below, which has been slightly adapted from Figure 1 above to describe subject-specific and language-related learner competences.*

Figure 2: Learners' language-related competences for a specific subject

c. *If possible, share your insights with one or more colleagues who have made similar notes for a **different subject** (e.g. mathematics). Then discuss to what extent the competences you have identified are subject-specific or subject-independent.*

d. *Suggest ideas for teacher education tasks focusing on:*

- o *how the competences that **learners** need to develop could be highlighted, and*
- o *raising **student teachers'** awareness of the language-related competences they need to develop in order to enable their future learners to acquire the necessary level of competence.*

Building block 4 contains more tasks and activities in teacher education, while (student) teachers' language-related competences are treated in Building block 6.

www.ecml.at/languagesensitiveteachereducation

www.ecml.at

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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