



## **THE LANGUAGE DIMENSION IN ALL SUBJECTS**

A Handbook for curriculum development  
and teacher training

### **The Handbook at a Glance**

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## **Introduction**

This document is an executive summary of the Council of Europe publication, *The Language Dimension in All Subjects: A Handbook for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training*. It does not attempt a chapter by chapter summary of the Handbook but presents the central arguments under five key themes: the language dimension in subjects; policy initiatives to promote quality and equity; view of language; subject issues and teacher development.

## **The Language Dimension in Subjects**

It is widely recognised that achievement in education depends to a large degree on developing competence in language. Schools have always recognised this fact and have sought to ensure that learners have a sufficient command of language in order to ensure success. However the teaching of language has tended to be seen just as a subject on its own and not as an important element across all subjects. Even when language has been acknowledged as a factor in the learning of all subjects, it has tended to be treated in a narrow way, focusing primarily on vocabulary acquisition, spelling, punctuation and grammar. Proficiency in these skills is not unimportant but represents only one small aspect of what developing language for subject teaching and learning entails. Teachers of all subjects need to go further and recognise the different ways language is used in the classroom and, in particular, the vital role language plays in learning and understanding subject content. Focusing on different uses of language in the classroom opens up a range of important questions related to practice. For example: do teachers ensure that the language they use is demanding but accessible? are they sufficiently aware of the language difficulties that individuals experience when learning a subject? when setting tasks do they make sufficiently clear what

type of language is required and do they provide enough support for learners?

It may be tempting for teachers to seek to reduce the language demands placed on the learners when difficulties are encountered. However that can result in making the intellectual challenge too low, with teachers unwittingly contributing to underachievement. Written texts may be over-simplified or even ignored in favour of oral explanations and visual stimuli; writing tasks may be reduced to having learners filling in gaps in sentences, or even just copying. Subject teachers may be tempted to avoid asking students to write coherent and extended prose because they know that many students find this activity difficult, but rely instead on extensive oral exchanges and low level writing tasks. This may arise when the difference between spoken and written language is not sufficiently acknowledged. Reading and writing may not be given enough support in the subject classroom because it is assumed that pupils will acquire competence in these areas as easily as they do in conversational speaking and listening. The tacit assumption is that because pupils can engage in general classroom talk about subject content, they will be able to make the transfer to understanding/decoding complex texts or writing without further help. While oral communication in the classroom is extremely important for helping pupils to use their prior knowledge and negotiate the meaning of new concepts, they are usually obliged to formulate the newly acquired knowledge in increasingly articulated, coherent and abstract forms and eventually in (explicit) writing. It is important, then, not to underestimate the role of writing in helping to restructure thought and expand knowledge in the process of writing itself. The pedagogical solution is not straightforward but it lies in knowing how to balance appropriate challenge with the right kind of support so that learners can be helped to succeed.

The term 'academic language' helps to convey the key elements of what is required in the classroom for learning subjects. This term refers to the language characteristics of the school subjects and the aspects of language proficiency that are valued and required by the school. These go beyond the spontaneous and generally informal language used in everyday social life. Students need to be able to use language not just for these informal purposes but also for learning content, for expressing their understanding and for interacting with others about the meaning and implications of what they learn. Academic language is more specialised and tends to have some of the following characteristics: higher frequency of longer, complex sentences; impersonal statements and passive voice; abstract terms and figurative expressions. Texts formulated in academic language tend to be more precise, explicit, detached and structured. The language used for teaching and learning purposes (the language of schooling) will in practice be a combination of informal language uses, content language (the more technical language of the subject) and academic language.<sup>1</sup> In practice these three categories will not be entirely distinct. This can result in the mistaken assumption that the acquisition of academic language will occur naturally and without intervention by the teacher.

Acquiring a command of academic expression goes hand in hand with the development of subject knowledge and understanding. Learners have to make the progression from their immediate, ordinary conception of the world to one that is more sophisticated and academically based. In parallel, this transition is also a shift in language competence, from ordinary forms of communication to more knowledge-related forms of expression. For example, learners

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, page 24 of the Handbook for a more detailed discussion of these categories.

need to be helped to make progress from a narrative style to a more objective form of reporting. Narrating an experience can proceed through a chronological sequence of facts, activities or situations which can move in a fairly straightforward way from one association to another. The style used in reports, in contrast, will not necessarily be in chronological order and will use forms of abstraction that enable general relationships to be expressed. This path from personal narrative to reporting has to be managed with care, to ensure a transition from forms of expression that are more informal to wording that is closer to academic expression. For example, learners need to be helped to acquire: the appropriate terminology (a typical example in French would be the use of '*précipitation*' (precipitation) as opposed to '*pluie*' (rain)) and its usage; use of personal pronouns ('The eagle is a bird of prey. It...') and generic terms ('element', 'substance', 'problem', etc.); objectivised forms of quantification and location in time (beginning, interval, frequency, duration, and so on), i.e. not assessed or identified in relation to the speaker ('It is too hot', i.e. for me personally); words emphasising relationships in terms of enumeration, time or logic, particularly in the form of conjunctions, coordinating ('moreover') or subordinating ('since'), in places where a simple juxtaposition may suffice in oral discourse ('He was late. I left.');

ways of expressing certainty (general statements in the present indicative: 'Water boils at 100 degrees. '), doubt, possibility, limitation, and so on; the use of conventional assessments ('important results', 'interesting findings', 'plausible theories', etc.).

These are some examples of the type of language learning required for students to become competent in the language of schooling. The term 'language of schooling' is widely used to describe the dominant (sometimes only) national or minority/regional language used in the classroom for teaching. 'Language of instruction' is often used for the same purpose, although some critics object to this term

on the grounds that it implies a narrow, transmission view of what teaching entails.

Contemporary societies are, in most cases, multicultural with increasing diversity as a consequence of mobility and migration. This presents a considerable challenge for schools because the main language used for teaching and learning is often not the first or home language of many of the students. To say that it is important for students to develop competence in the language of schooling (or language used as the medium of instruction) is clearly self-evident. Students need sufficient competence in the language to be able to understand and participate in the lessons. Even if more than one language is used as the language of schooling, it is likely that a number of students will still not be using the first or home language for learning purposes. They may underachieve, not because of any lack of ability, but because of their difficulties with the language. Their fluency in basic oral communication in social situations can easily be misinterpreted as an indication that they are also fluent in the academic language needed for learning. This is an important issue, and education systems and schools take different approaches to supporting students who struggle with the language of schooling in this way. Different strategies tend to be adopted to support such students: complete withdrawal from the mainstream (students are given support in separate classes), immersion in the mainstream (there they receive systematic language support for as long as needed) and partial withdrawal from the mainstream (care being taken, however, to ensure that such measures do not lead to discrimination and compartmentalisation in view of their frequency and duration). While different combinations of these approaches are possible it is essential to ensure early intervention and to support the development of pupils' capacity for academic language through engagement with the different curriculum subjects.

Provision for pupils who need support to be able to use the dominant language is important, whatever form it takes. However it is not enough just to focus on competence in the language of schooling for informal or more technical communication in the classroom, it should include the dimension of academic language use. Moreover, in order to close the achievement gap it is not enough to systematically support language development only in the very early stages (elementary and primary education). Such early intervention is necessary, but not sufficient. Students who have passed the threshold level and who have a functional command of the dominant language of schooling also need targeted support so that they can develop higher levels of competence in the use of academic language up to the end of compulsory schooling – even up to the university entrance level. Not to do so is to run the risk of contributing to inequality in educational provision.

### **Policy initiatives to promote quality and equity**

In order to ensure that learners acquire the necessary competence in the language of schooling for successful learning, support is needed at all levels of the education system. Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States draws attention to the importance of competence in language for educational success and highlights the importance of language not just as a separate subject in school but in all subjects across the curriculum. The importance of the language of schooling to ensure success in education has also been widely recognised by other key international bodies such as OECD, UNESCO and the European Commission. Support for the development of policy and its implementation at international and national level is essential for giving credibility to curriculum development initiatives, particularly in education systems that have become increasingly centralised and

subject to political influence. Language is important in ensuring not just high standards of achievement but also more equity in educational provision. It is widely recognised that some students enjoy a considerable advantage because they are more comfortable in using and understanding the academic language of school subjects, while vulnerable learners are further disadvantaged. As discussed in the previous section, for many students the language of schooling will not be their first language and they may be doubly disadvantaged.

An adequate command of the academic language that predominates in school is essential not just for ensuring progress and achievement in all subjects while in school, but also in later life for full participation as a citizen in the democratic life of society. This is another reason why it is important that all students are given specific support in using language in their subjects to ensure success. The recognition of the importance of the language of schooling at the 'macro' level is an important basis for success in policy implementation at the 'meso' or school level. That does not necessarily mean that top-down policy implementation is always required, nor necessarily the best approach. Irrespective of the particular operational approach, support at the highest level for initiatives to improve language teaching is important.

It is also important that the language dimension is explicitly identified in curriculum documents. This can be approached in different ways. One method is to outline the more general academic language skills needed for learning in school and then have individual subjects address their own specific needs against the general framework. Another is to focus primarily on the individual subjects, spelling out the linguistic demands or expectations within the subject. Comparison can then be made across subjects looking at commonalities and differences. The

framework approach can lead to initial systematic reflections on what the relevant competences are, based on an understanding of knowledge acquisition and the challenges involved in different phases of classroom teaching and learning. A subject-oriented curriculum that embeds the language dimension in the subject learning outcomes, on the other hand, can be more precise and detailed and perhaps more likely to influence texts book authors to address the language dimension within subjects. By making comparisons across subjects, a common view of what it is that each student is entitled to know and do in terms of language competence for success in school can be identified.<sup>2</sup>

The need for guidance in the curriculum to help all students master the language of schooling applies to all levels of education. In practice, language learning occupies a central place in primary education. Since the same teacher is responsible for a significant portion, or even the whole, of the time spent by children at school, opportunities arise for linguistic support through a variety of language use situations. But everyone involved in primary education must make sure that the omnipresence of language does not obscure the need for explicit and structured work on it outside the specific classroom periods devoted to developing competence in language. To ensure that primary education lays the foundations for subsequent language work, it is vital for specific learning objectives to be linked with the various periods devoted to oral work, reading, writing or vocabulary work.

It is generally recognised that the pursuit of quality in education means that the quality of educational provision overall, including

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<sup>2</sup> See Beacco, J.-C., Coste, D., van de Ven, P. and Vollmer, H. (2010) *Language and school subjects - Linguistic dimensions of knowledge building in school curricula*, Strasbourg, Council of Europe. [www.coe.int/lang-platform](http://www.coe.int/lang-platform) → Language(s) in other subjects

measures to promote inclusion and equity, need to be evaluated, in addition to evaluation of the curriculum and learning outcomes. Making an overall assessment of a form of education is a necessary though complex undertaking. The process is made even more complex when evaluation of the language dimension in education is included. However this is necessary to ensure quality provision. For example, a judgment needs to be made whether an education system is identifying and making an appropriate response to the needs of learners: their language difficulties may be mistaken for difficulties with understanding, learning or reproducing subject content and their abilities and learning potential accordingly underestimated. Making explicit the specific linguistic competences which learners must be able to master is another important criterion for the quality of curricula which must clearly specify the importance of taking explicit account of the linguistic dimensions of the various subjects and indicate the areas of convergence between school subjects. In particular, it is vital for the type of language expected in summative assessment tests, official examinations or periodic assessments of learners' competence in a given subject to be described and illustrated with examples at the appropriate place in curricula, in accordance with national educational cultures. If the descriptions are vague, the texts produced by pupils will be assessed on the basis of criteria which are unknown to them or lacking in transparency.

The development of policy is also significant at the school level. Here however it is important to see policy development as a constant process of dialogue and shared understanding, not just as the writing of a static document. Some of the early, historical attempts to develop language across the curriculum resulted in the formation of a written 'language policy' that had little impact on actual practice and were left in cupboards to gather dust. A written

document may, however, be helpful as a focus for coordinating an approach to language education in a school. Perhaps ‘language policy’ is the wrong term if it simply means a general statement of goals and values, important though those are. What is required is a policy/working document that seeks to coordinate the approach to language education in a school. Possible items for inclusion in a school language policy document include the following dimensions:

- a statement that provides a commitment to the importance of language in all subjects;
- a description of the relationship between language and learning as a basis for understanding the importance of language in all subjects;
- an indication of the general attitude towards language that is being fostered in the school;
- a glossary of key language terminology students will need to acquire to facilitate their ability to talk about language;
- an agreed approach to marking and feedback in all subjects, including the approach taken to mistakes in spelling, grammar etc.;
- examples of practical teaching strategies that can be used in all subjects to help support language learning, especially for more vulnerable students (e.g. techniques for reading texts, ideas for scaffolding writing, ways of facilitating oral work etc.);
- an inventory of key language uses in order to ensure breadth in subject teachers approach to language that can be adapted in the context of specific subjects.

Above all a policy on language at national or school level needs to be based on an informed view of language and its relationship to learning.

## View of language

Language needs to be viewed not just as 'system' but as 'discourse'. The term 'discourse' places emphasis on the *use* of language and its different functions; it draws attention to the living, dynamic nature of language and the way it creates meaning in social contexts. By drawing attention to aspects of language not just as system (e.g. rules of grammar) but also as discourse (e.g. what is the writer aiming to achieve in this text? how does the writer achieve those goals?), subject teachers can be helped to see the close relationship between understanding of subject content and language use. On the traditional view students would be taught to use language in one classroom and expected to apply that learning elsewhere. However, the emphasis on the importance of language use and context highlights the fact that the learning of the subject and the development of language are inextricably tied. An understanding of the functions of the role of language and the relationship between language and learning is an essential requirement for successful implementation of policy and practice.

Clearly there are different forms that language takes in classroom communication (e.g. presentation by the teacher, questioning and discussion, exchanges between pupils, presentation by pupils, production of written texts). It is important that they are not just taken for granted as they are not all equivalent in terms of their role in knowledge acquisition. The role of a teacher who is sensitive to the linguistic dimension of academic knowledge is to create clear and appropriate links between the different forms of communication to lead learners from spontaneous oral exchanges and personal written accounts to questioning, controlled discussion and coherent written texts. Subject teachers are used to thinking about progression in subject learning but they need also to reflect on the importance of progression in the language demands placed

on learners and their gradual acquisition of higher levels of language competence.

The function of language is more than just communication but also incorporates knowledge building and the development of understanding. This insight has implications for pedagogical practice. If the sole function of language is thought to be communication, then teaching will tend to be restricted to the transmission of information in a traditional didactic style. The realisation that active use of language is an important part of cognitive development leads to a wider repertoire of approaches including: exploratory talk to develop concepts, writing for learning, task based learning and group activities to support a cooperative learning approach to the knowledge building process. Pair and group activities have an essential role to play in the co-construction of knowledge. What can be described as 'learner agency - talk' helps pupils gradually to develop their autonomy as confidence and knowledge grows. It is not a question of replacing one set of practices with another but widening the range of approaches in the classroom.

It is helpful for the broad concept 'language' to be broken down into categories that have a useful practical application. For example the key terms 'genres' and 'cognitive-linguistic functions' provide a format for helping subject teachers to know how they might approach the development of language in their subject. When students are asked to write up an account of a lesson (an experiment in science, an outside visit in geography, a drama presentation in language as subject) they may be left confused if no further information is provided on the type/category of writing they are meant to use e.g. report, log, personal reflection etc. The term 'genre' is useful in this context because it directs attention to the type/category of writing or speaking that is required; it points to the

fact that certain texts share common features and can thus be grouped together. This is beneficial for subject teachers because it can assist them in setting a writing or an oral task with more detail of what is required, and in determining what sorts of help students might require to complete it. It also helps the students themselves develop knowledge about what type of writing is needed for different contexts. Such knowledge is also important when approaching reading because it helps to know what type of text is being dealt with. For example, a different emphasis in reading strategies may be helpful when faced with a magazine article (browsing, reading visual clues) or a technical report (engaging prior knowledge, using knowledge of the likely structure, focusing on detail). The factors that determine groupings of texts are not confined to the forms that are 'internal' to the text itself such as vocabulary and grammar but also draw on factors that are more 'external' and contextual such as purpose and audience. Thus if the intention in writing the text is, for example, to describe, argue or persuade this will influence the way it is structured and the choice of language.

The use of the term 'text' is important in this context. It highlights the fact that a body of oral or written output should be considered as a whole and not just in terms of its constituent parts. Language may be considered at word level (e.g. spelling and vocabulary) or sentence level (e.g. grammar and punctuation) but it is when it is considered as a text that notions like context, meaning, purpose and deep understanding come more into play. When subject teachers are asked to give due consideration to language in their teaching, it may be tempting for them to assume that this requires them to acquire technical linguistic knowledge that is outside their specialism. However, language at text level requires less specialised knowledge about forms of language but more focus on function i.e. how language is used in particular contexts.

The role of language in knowledge building, and the relationship between language and thinking is central to the importance of language in all subjects. The key term 'cognitive linguistic function' signals the close relationship between cognition and language. In the subject classroom, students will engage in activities such as explaining, arguing, hypothesising, comparing etc. These types of activities are central to learning and understanding in any subject, and clearly require students to think. However, at the same time they require students to use language in particular ways in order to express their intention, e.g. to describe as opposed to explaining, comparing or hypothesising. These macro functions underlie all communication, including the highly subject-specific forms of expression or meaning-making.

The term 'language sensitive' teaching usefully conveys the approach that is required in the classroom. The word 'sensitive' is important here and is aimed at capturing not just the importance of language in the subject classroom but also the importance of knowing how to translate that knowledge into effective practice. For example, such approaches as the use of writing frames to structure pupils writing tasks, the giving of language related feedback on written work, providing guidance on aspects of the genre that is required in written tasks need to be used in the appropriate context. A specific example of a practical activity may be appropriate in one context but not in another. Much depends on the relationship between students and teacher, the prior background knowledge and level of achievement of the students, the attitude of the students to language. Being language sensitive means being able to judge how language impinges on learning, and knowing when intervention specifically directed at language is appropriate and what form it should take. This means being able to take the relevance of the particular context into account and not

adopting mechanistic approaches that might run the risk of distorting the subject learning.

## **Subject Issues**

The ways the aims of subjects are conceived also has implications for the uses of language in the classroom. Subjects can no longer be seen as simply a body of information that has to be transferred to learners. Instead there needs to be a more deep-seated understanding of the contribution that the subject makes to broader education goals and values; all subjects have a contribution to make to developing the learner as an active, committed democratic citizen in a diverse society and to the process of plurilingual and intercultural education. A subject like science may, for example, address ethical issues that are important for society such as energy consumption, stem cell research, genetic engineering. Such aims also have implications for the range of language uses in the classroom, implying as they do active participation, critical reading, the expression of opinions, the weighing of evidence and participation in dialogue.

The concept of 'subject literacy', which is both functional and general at the same time, is a useful concept for describing the broader goals of subject education. It means getting acquainted with and feeling at home in ways of thinking and communicating in the respective subject discourse communities, becoming new members of them (e.g. as a young physicist, biologist, artist, musician, historian, foreign language expert etc.) and participating in the relevant discourse, at least to some extent. Subject teaching and learning can thus be thought of as a process of initiation into these different discourse communities of practice so that every learner can at least follow the specific ways of exchanging and

arguing, also partly contributing to them actively. Aspects of subject literacy can be listed as follows:

- comprehending/understanding in-depth (the meaning of an utterance, a text, a problem);
- communicating and negotiating knowledge;
- reflecting on the acquisitional process, the learning outcomes and their personal as well as social uses;
- applying knowledge to and within other contexts;
- participating in the socio-scientific world;
- transferring generalisable knowledge, skills, attitudes.

These aspects of subject literacy are important even if the curriculum at secondary level is not organised on the basis of separate subjects for they indicate the importance of a broad conception of what the learning entails. Alternative ways of organising the curriculum using thematic or project teaching or combining subjects into broader disciplines still need to recognise the importance of the relationship between language and learning and the need for an agreed approach to language education throughout a school. Also, the relationship between language in all subjects and 'language as subject' needs to be considered.

The term 'language as subject' is used here to refer to the teaching of French in France, German in Germany etc. Of course teaching a second or foreign language is also strictly speaking 'language as subject' but 'language as subject' is being used here to refer to the teaching of a national/official language (and associated literature). Before the arrival of ideas about the importance of literacy in other subjects, language as subject was seen as having the main responsibility for developing proficiency in the language of schooling and for ensuring that learners had the necessary language skills to function in society. On this view language as subject was

seen as a 'service' subject: in other words it was seen as providing a service by teaching the necessary language skills which were then put to use elsewhere in other subjects. There was a separation between the acquisition of skills in one context and their application elsewhere. However if the responsibility for language education is now borne by all subjects, what is the specific role of language as subject?

Although language as subject should not be seen as a 'service' subject, it does have a special role to play in relation to language education. Teachers of language as subject have a responsibility for monitoring and teaching of basic elements of speaking and listening, reading and writing. This is likely to be more evident in the early years of primary education but may extend for some students including children of migration into the later years. Teachers of other subjects need to be able to support that enterprise but it is important that responsibility for specialist teaching of basic literacy is clearly designated. Language as subject in addition still retains a central role in the development of language. This does not mean that certain aspects are taught in language as subject and then just practised in other subjects, for this view does not take sufficient account of the embedded and contextual nature of language and meaning. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that in language as subject it is language itself that is at its centre whereas in other subjects understanding and working with content is the central goal. Language as subject provides tools for analysis of texts that can also be used in other subjects (liaison between teachers is important to creative consistency in use of terminology and, for example, in ways of conceptualising 'genres'). It also has a key role in the teaching of literature. The study of language itself is again not unique to language as subject because opportunities may arise for example in history (in looking at aspects of language change) or in geography

(in looking at varieties of languages in the world). However language as subject has a special responsibility in developing explicit knowledge about language, and in ensuring that learners have the necessary terminology to be able to speak about language uses in an informed way.

It is important that language as subject is not seen in isolation for the rest of the curriculum. This can happen when its aims are conceived differently from other subjects. For example, a traditional view saw the aims of language as subject and foreign language education very differently. Language as subject was seen not just as a tool for communication but as having a special role in the personal and social development of the learner. Foreign language learning, in contrast, was seen in more functional terms whereby learners are developing the skill to do in a foreign language what they are already able to do in their first language. The narrow functional view of foreign language teaching ignores the intercultural dimension which is an essential element of individual growth and moral development. The encompassing aims and values of plurilingual and intercultural education helps to strengthen the links between not just language as subject and foreign language teaching but also the language dimension in all subjects.<sup>3</sup>

## **Teacher development**

Understanding how to deal with the language dimension in subjects does not necessarily come naturally to subject teachers who are quite appropriately concerned with learning of subject content. However focusing specifically on the language dimension is not a distraction but a necessity for subject learning. One of the essential

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<sup>3</sup> See *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* (2015). Strasbourg, Council of Europe. [www.coe.int/lang-platform](http://www.coe.int/lang-platform) → Curricula and Evaluation

ingredients in ensuring the successful implementation of new policies on language education at school level is the provision of pre- and in- service teacher education and training. A policy on language cannot be easily implemented by prescribing to teachers exactly how to behave in the classroom. Teachers need to understand and have ownership of the policies they are seeking to implement. The imposition of a 'quick fix', 'top down' policy without relevant professional development (whatever form it takes) is unlikely to be successful; it simply misses the full impact of the concept of 'language sensitive teaching'. Instead a process of ongoing support is needed with clear explanation and discussion of the underlying thinking, examination of practical examples and an opportunity to engage in discussion and share practice with other colleagues. It is important that teachers of specific subjects have a chance to meet and share perspectives as a group but also to do the same with teachers of other subjects.

Discussion of this kind amongst subject teachers is necessary but it is by itself not sufficient. Previous historical attempts to implement policies on language across the curriculum were not undertaken with sufficient analytical tools and instruments to provide support for teachers in knowing how to proceed. It is not enough simply to tell subject teachers they have a role in the development of language, they must be supported with examples of more detailed and structured approaches to help implementation, for example, ways of categorising language, subject-specific language dimensions, lists of cognitive-linguistic functions and genres, generic and subject descriptors that embody aspects of language, approaches to curriculum change, inventories for self-assessment of practice, examples of practical approaches in the classroom.

Implementation strategies are of crucial importance when it comes to integrating the language dimension into content teaching. The

use of language (learning) advisors or literacy coaches can offer help and support based on the individual school's needs and their students' language biographies; other contextual factors (e.g. availability of resources, professional background of staff, parents' attitudes and priorities) can also be taken into account. Across Europe, the United States and other parts of the world, many programmes for literacy coaches (language advisors) have been installed and evaluated on a regional or local basis. Although they differ in many organisational, strategic and content features they share a common underlying approach: the need to build up trust and engage teachers in a continuous learning process about effective ways of how to combine the teaching of literacy and content.

Scaffolding is highly relevant for the support of learners and their attempts to acquire academic language competences in all of the subject areas. It refers to a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater linguistic and textual independence in the learning process. 'Scaffolding' means that students are provided with successive levels of temporary language support that help them reach higher levels of comprehension and skill acquisition than they achieve without assistance. This support can be provided by teachers or from peers in activities which promote the co-construction of knowledge. Techniques to scaffold language uses in the classroom might include:

- explaining a new concept through a concept map
- making deliberate comparisons with a first / another language and culture
- focusing on particular words to develop a meta-language
- providing and explicating fruitful examples; asking students to notice particular aspects/features of language use

- highlighting language patterns for specific cognitive-linguistic functions (e.g. define, describe, explain, evaluate, argue )
- providing textual models (genres) for oral or written content-based communication
- using questions to probe students' conceptions and prompt them to describe their interpretations and challenge their opinions
- using various ways of representing ideas and concepts (e.g. visuals, diagrams, organisers, highlighting, various media and technologies)
- giving feedback that relates to improving subject literacy.

Subject-specific language requirements call for scaffolding techniques on a macro level, also called systemic scaffolding or hard scaffolding. As opposed to scaffolding on a micro level (soft or point-of-need scaffolding) they are directly associated with specific curricular goals of a discipline. Thus, language sensitive teachers are able to predict the students' need for support because this need is not individual but built into the structure of the topic and its conceptual base. In contrast, point-of-need techniques of scaffolding require spontaneous supportive action whenever students are confronted with language obstacles that cannot be anticipated by the teacher when (s)he plans the lesson.

In many instances, national curricula for content teaching do not explicitly specify neither (minimum) language requirements nor aims and objectives of language learning e.g. in the history, chemistry or mathematics classroom. In other instances, requirements, aims and objectives are indicated, but they are not well coordinated with respect to (a) terminology, (b) quality criteria (e.g. 'how to write a well-organised and well-phrased summary or lab-report'), (c) grade level, (d) achievement level (e.g. minimum,

average, excellence) or (e) levels of linguistic specification (e.g. word – sentence/grammar – text/genre). Despite a lack of external support of this kind, many individual schools have started to set up a curriculum for language requirements and literacy objectives. The evaluation of such bottom-up initiatives shows that organising the different knowledge domains (by departments, or groups of teachers), often in a concerted effort is a long-term and challenging process needing willingness on all sides to invest time into negotiating shared perspectives.

## Conclusion

The development of students' language proficiency in schools should be the responsibility of teachers of all subjects. This has very specific practical implications for schools, curriculum development and teacher education. The recommendations for practice, however, do not exist in a vacuum but are formulated from deep-seated values and principles. The Council of Europe's mission is to protect and promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as essential foundations for any society committed to social inclusion, social cohesion, equity and respect for diversity. In order to see clearly the link between such values and the practicalities of language teaching in schools, a re-thinking is needed of how language education is conceived and realised.

It is no longer appropriate for language education to be conceived narrowly and confined to one or two areas of the curriculum. Instead it needs to be seen as central to every school's mission and culture, and it needs to extend to all subjects in the curriculum. Only then will the inequalities caused by taking language too much for granted be rectified. Many learners will not acquire the necessary competence in the language of schooling without appropriate teaching that integrates language and subject content learning.

The development of competence in language has to be viewed not just as the acquisition of a narrow set of skills but as a process which equips all learners for participation in modern societies with all that entails in terms of expressing a point of view, understanding nuances of meaning, engaging in purposeful dialogue, etc. Subjects should no longer be seen as simply a body of information that has to be transferred to learners. Instead there needs to be a more deep-seated understanding of the contribution that the subject makes to broader education goals and values; all subjects have a

contribution to make to developing the learner as an active, committed democratic citizen in a diverse society and to the process of plurilingual and intercultural education. Language education should always embrace diversity and plurilingualism, respecting, but also seeking to extend, the language repertoires that students bring to schools. The development of values and their associated competences such as respect for human rights, openness to others, a sense of civic duty, and analytical and critical thinking skills are largely developed and exhibited in and through language.

It is not enough that teachers be told that they must 'take responsibility for language education', in some vague formulation. Rather, they need concepts and tools to be helped to understand what this means in concrete, practical terms. Technical terms can and should be kept to a minimum, but some key concepts such as 'academic language', 'texts', 'genres', 'cognitive-linguistic functions' are important for helping policy makers, curriculum developers, teacher educators and teachers ensure that the general goals are realised in practice.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States recognises that it is thanks to high quality teaching of all the school subjects, taking their language dimensions into account, that students gradually acquire the competences in the more "academic" language used in teaching. Education authorities, schools, teacher trainers need to respond the challenge of improving standards through the implementation of policies and practices that take seriously the language dimension in all subjects.

