

# Graz Declaration on language education 2010

## “Quality education for plurilingual people living in multilingual societies”

ECML

### Background

On 7 January, in Graz, Austria, the INGO-Professional Network Forum on language education was founded at the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) of the Council of Europe. The first ever meeting of its kind brought together eight renowned international associations acting in this area which all signed bilateral cooperation agreements with the ECML. Representatives from the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, the Multilingualism Policy Unit of the European Commission, and the Canadian institutional ECML partner – the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute of the University of Ottawa (OLBI) also participated in the meeting. Professor Henry Widdowson (Vienna University) provided comments from the perspective of an independent expert in the field. The one day event enabled the partners to gain a common understanding of the working context and the respective competences of the associations – which all deal with policy, research and practice to a different extent – and to become more aware of the common issues shared and challenges identified within the Professional Network Forum.

After lively discussions on the key challenges facing language education today and on suitable areas for common action, the network unanimously agreed to further develop cooperation.

The Graz Declaration 2010 is a direct result of this meeting. It represents a summary of issues raised in the discussions, and provides the basis for the creation of, as well as for the activities to be undertaken by, this new network.

### Preamble

Increased mobility of people and globalisation of social and economic processes stimulated by the rapidly absorbed innovations in communication technology create new challenges for educational systems: multilingual and multicultural classrooms, compatibility of educational systems and qualifications, mobile media, etc. They call for the urgent development and implementation of new approaches to education in general and language education in particular (policy-making, teacher education, learning, teaching, and assessment). A new education concept is needed to meet the needs of plurilingual people living in multilingual societies – people capable of using several languages at different levels of competence living in and contributing to an integrated society.

#### I. Rationale for a new concept:

1. Linguistic and cultural diversity in modern European societies is a reality and is growing – this should not be viewed merely as an obstacle and a problem to be solved but more as an asset and a potential benefit
2. Social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and democratic citizenship together with economic prosperity represent important aims in building a more humane and inclusive Europe
3. Unrestricted and fair lifelong access to good quality education is a fundamental human right and a pre-requisite for achieving the above aims
4. As all education uses language as its vehicle, well developed language competences constitute the necessary basis for adequate access to good quality education

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5. Good quality education cannot be achieved without adequate support for the appropriate development of learners’ language capacity – efficient language use is both the necessary means for and the desired outcome of education
6. In good quality education efficient exploration of knowledge and skills brought in by learners is combined with effective support for knowledge acquirement and skill development necessary for learners to become successful individuals and responsible members of society
7. Adequate support for the development of learners’ language capacity takes into account, makes use of, and builds further all language competences of learners and seeks to develop those required for their educational success in a given context
8. A shift in focus is required in this situation – from support for the development of competences in separate ‘languages’ to enhancing the development of a general, individual strategy of ‘linguaging’ – exploiting available linguistic resources strategically, thus making efficient use of one’s own innate ability to ‘language’
9. Efficient use of new communication technologies is an important basis for and part of ‘linguaging’ strategy
10. Special attention and support for the development of language abilities required for educational success in a given context needs to be offered to ‘vulnerable’ learners: those with low socio-economic status and complex linguistic background

## II. Important elements of a new concept:

### A. Planning and organisation

1. Provision of a comprehensive overview of valid European and international reference points (‘organised knowledge’) on which to base national, regional, and local language education policies, strategies, and practices
2. Establishment of an international forum for discussion on and clarification of language education policies and their implementation
3. Integrated approaches to language education on national, regional, and local level (policy-making, teacher education, learning, teaching, and assessment) encompassing all languages present in education
4. Approaches aimed at overcoming compartmentalisation in education and practice of:
  - a) teachers of different foreign languages
  - b) foreign language teachers and teachers of languages as school subjects (German in Germany, Swedish in Sweden, etc)
  - c) language teachers and teachers of other subjects

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### **B. Research**

5. Closer international and regional cooperation aimed at dissemination and implementation of research results relevant for the development of new language policies and thus bridging the gap between research findings and policy making
6. Ensuring implementation and sustainability of results of relevant research projects designed to address new challenges in the field of language education

### **C. Teacher education and training**

7. Identifying and monitoring changes in requirements for language teaching professionals
8. Innovative programmes aimed at attracting newcomers to the language teaching profession
9. Development and implementation of mobility programmes for teachers
10. Development of national, regional, and international recognition schemes promoting quality and outstanding achievements in (language) education

### **D. Learning, teaching, assessment, use of new technologies**

11. Accelerated language learning approaches to building up plurilingual competences (f. ex. based on inter-comprehension)
12. Enhanced use of personal language profiles reflected upon, built up, documented, and evaluated on an ongoing basis
13. New approaches for learning, teaching, and assessment in multilingual and multicultural classrooms
14. Further development of assessment literacy in language education
15. Enhanced professionalism in high-stake evaluation, assessment, and testing in all educational sectors
16. Development of approaches to assess plurilingual competences (focus on the user and his/her plurilingual profile)
17. Reference standards for competences in languages of schooling and academic education (languages taught as specific subjects and used across the curriculum)
18. European reference level descriptions for most widely taught non-European languages
19. Further work on mutual recognition of language qualifications, specifically in less widely taught languages and languages for specific purposes, based upon reliable and transparent use of common reference frameworks, such as the CEFR

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20. Redefinition of the concept of literacy in multilingual communities in the light of new communication technologies that provide new reading and writing contexts

21. Development of appropriate pedagogies for the efficient use of new technologies in (language) education

### E. Use of Council of Europe instruments

22. Further development and implementation of Council of Europe tools, such as the CEFR and the ELP

23. Implementation of relevant Council of Europe recommendations, such as Recommendation (2008)7 on the use of the CEFR and the promotion of plurilingualism

### Conclusion

The members of the Professional Network Forum, representing independent associations and institutions, endeavour to take the lead in and/or support the development, dissemination, and promotion of these elements in accordance with the specific character of and within the area of activities defined for each organisation and institution.

Graz, 7. Januar 2010

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Peter Brown	the European Association for Quality Language Services (EAQUALS)
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