

European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz: '15 years promoting excellence in language education' – anniversary event, 1 July 2010

Speaking and understanding one another's language is a fundamental prerequisite for being able to live together in a Europe without dividing lines. To assist in this challenge, the Council of Europe created the European Centre for Modern Languages, an institution whose specific mission is to improve the practice of language education throughout Europe.

Founded in Graz, Austria, the ECML has been working since 1995 with leading experts and institutions in the field of language education. Over the past 15 years, policy and professional development needs have been radically transformed through political developments and the convergence of new information technologies. The Centre assists its member states in responding to the challenges of Europe's multicultural societies in a period of unparalleled change and mobility and seeks to make a positive difference to the language education profession through its

programmes of activities, currently through its 2008-2011 'Empowering language professionals' programme.

Based upon the underlying values of the Council of Europe, the ECML supports the fostering of linguistic and cultural diversity and the promotion of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism among European citizens. In this, the Centre supports the application of language policy instruments developed by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division. Through intensified contacts with the European Commission and the launch of the INGO-Professional Network Forum on language education the Centre seeks to further strengthen its links with professional bodies working in language education and to create synergies between organisations with similar aims.

On 1 July 2010, the ECML organised an event on the occasion of its 15th anniversary, hosted jointly with the

Austrian Minister for Education, Arts and Culture, Claudia Schmied, and the Austrian Minister for Science and Research, Beatrix Karl. The event looked towards the future role of the Centre, based upon 15 years experience of promoting excellence in language education.

In the audience were representatives of the Council of Europe member states at two levels: ministry officials responsible for nominating experts to the ECML's activities and the Committee of Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe. The event was also attended by experts and decision-makers from the host country.

During the celebration, the Austrian authorities unanimously praised the achievements of the Centre. Claudia Schmied stressed that "plurilingualism" in globalised societies is "more important than ever". In the message she sent to the meeting she stated that "the fostering



Speakers at the 15th anniversary event and representatives from the founding states of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), including (4th from left) Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport and Coordinator for Intercultural Dialogue of the Council of Europe, standing next to Beatrix Karl, Federal Minister of Science and Research, Austria and (farthest right) Waldemar Martiniuk, Executive Director of the ECML.

of the linguistic and cultural diversity represents an asset for maintain and supporting our democracies," also in respect to the integration of migrants. In the domain of education and science, Beatrix Karl highlighted "cross-border mobility" as a growing phenomenon to be supported. She added that speaking several languages represented a "prerequisite for the productive exchange on an international level".

Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Director General of Education, Culture, Heritage,

Youth and Sport and Coordinator for Intercultural Dialogue of the Council of Europe, described the Centre as "ideally placed" to answer to new challenges in the field of language policy and professional development by developing innovative approaches in language teaching. The Centre acts like a "catalyst and provides means of support for educational change within its 34 member states."

The representative of the European Commission, Fiorella Perotto, Deputy

Head of the Section for Multilingual Policy of the Directorate General for Education and Culture, noted that the "ECML has become a landmark in encouraging excellence and innovation in language teaching". She praised, in particular, the Centre's networking skills.

A panel discussion entitled 'Promoting quality education in modern multilingual Europe' highlighting the situation in Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands closed the celebration ceremony.

For further information visit the Centre's recently relaunched website
<http://www.ecml.at>



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Education Newsletter



Editorial

There is an old Scottish proverb that says "We'll never know the worth of water till the well go dry". Wells and water have often been used as metaphors for knowledge and learning: John Locke famously wrote of the 'fountain of all knowledge' and many people have 'a thirst for knowledge'. Water is essential to sustaining life, but it has to be pure: contaminated water can bring disease or worse. Assimilating knowledge and learning how to use it is also vital to human life and the development of our societies, but unless what we are given to drink is of good quality it may harm rather than nourish.

The right to education is enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights², but we must remember that we are responsible for the quality of the education we dispense. It is not merely a question of going through the motions of providing an education or stuffing learners with information. As George Bernard Shaw put it: "What we want is to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child."

The aim of the Directorate of Education and Languages is to help the Council of Europe member states to provide access to quality education for all: an education that enables everyone, children and adults, whatever their status or background, to fulfil their individual intellectual and physical potential and participate actively in a peaceful, democratic society respectful of human rights.

The 23rd Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Ljubljana, Slovenia, 4-5 June 2010 – see the previous issue of the Newsletter) highlighted the importance of teachers and teacher training in achieving this goal and the Pestalozzi Programme was shown particular appreciation by the ministers.

1. "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding", 1690

2. First Protocol, Article 2, 1952



23rd session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, 4-5 June 2010, Ljubljana, Slovenia: Ministers of Education and Heads of Delegation of the States Parties to the European Cultural Convention, Observer States, international and non-governmental organisations