

## **Language Awareness: An old-new approach to help second language acquisition. The Janua Linguarum project**

Ildikó Lőrincz

*The University of Western Hungary, Apáczai Csere János College of Education*

*(Translated by David Cronin, University of Western Hungary, Apáczai Csere János College of Education)*

### **Introduction: What do we mean by 'language awareness'?**

We mean an approach which brings every pupil into contact with a broad range of different-status languages, and links discovery activities with them. The aim is to give pupils a positive attitude to language diversity (including minority, immigrant and regional languages) and help them to develop metalinguistic skills which they can then apply to language learning (at school and outside).

This approach, in which schools assign an educational function to languages they do not really teach, is really new. It was first advocated in Great Britain in the 1980's and has since, sometimes with adjustments and under different names (*éveil/ouverture aux langues/au(x) langage(s)*, language awareness, *Sprachaufmerksamkeit*), been the subject of experimental schemes on various scales, mainly in primary schools. This applies particularly to Switzerland (the EOLE programme), Germany (also in connection with the EU Comenius programmes) and France. Since 1997, the EVLANG programme, supported by Socrates/Lingua, has brought together schools in seven European countries. Some five hundred classes are involved, and the aim is to assess the skills acquired by pupils after a one-year or eighteen-month course.

### **The approach**

Advocates of these schemes all make the same point at starting: various processes, such as migration, globalisation and European integration, are making our societies increasingly multilingual and multicultural. This is a real challenge for schools, which are expected, not only to develop their pupils' language abilities, but also to give them positive attitudes to otherness and difference, and to teach them to cope with diversity.

In spite of some recent positive developments, these pioneers also agree that current approaches to language teaching do not allow schools to do these things effectively although many pupils – because of their wide-ranging origins – experience diversity as soon as they start school.

They feel that the multilingual approach, which they recommend and practise, helps to prepare children better for life in linguistically and culturally diverse communities. The aim is to take diversity of languages, including those represented in the classroom and

normally ignored or even concealed, as a datum and work on it. Language diversity becomes the focus of learning activities which help pupils to develop the skills we mentioned earlier. This is achieved through a pedagogic approach of discovery using activities in which pupils participate actively to 'construct' their own learning.

At this stage in its development, they feel the time had come to publicise this approach more widely and try to give language awareness a bigger place in the curriculum (hence the project's provisional title: DifCurEv), from kindergarten to the end of secondary education. In principle, all the traditional school subjects are covered, though a special effort is made in language learning activities, in the hope that this will increase their effectiveness and diversity.

### **Aims and Tasks**

It is perhaps worth listing the aims and tasks of the project Janua Linguarum before further discussing the work already under way.

The aims are to:

- \* provoke interest for one's own and other people's languages
- \* provoke a positive attitude towards multilingualism and multiculturalism
- \* prevent racism
- \* develop metalinguistic competence
- \* develop learning skills

The tasks are:

- \* adaptation of materials produced in former projects
- \* developing of new materials for pupils
- \* developing of handbooks and training materials for teachers
- \* developing of tools for evaluating the materials

### **The story so far**

The project Janua Linguarium (JaLing) was put into place with the support of CELV(U. of Graz, Austria) and the programme Comenius in 2001 and will finish in 2004. It is in fact a continuation of the project Eulang (1998-2001) which had the aim of developing pedagogic support in primary classes. Eulang took place in France, Italy, Switzerland and Spain. Genelot (2001) has written a very detailed quantitative evaluation of participating classes in France and l'Ile de la Reunion.

JaLing, as well as having the above mentioned objectives, also aims at the diffusion and curricular insertion of language awareness both at various levels: nursery, primary and secondary. At present, 16 countries (France, Austria, Portugal, Greece, Slovenia, Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Estonia) are participating in the second stage of experiment which, consists of evaluating the pedagogic support already in place.

This evaluation is directed at defining the appropriateness of the support and their appreciation by the 'consumers': especially pupils, teachers and parents. Various methods are being used: questionnaires, interviews as well as reviews. The results of the first wave of evaluation has already been published (Candelier, 2003).

JaLing in Hungary began in October 2002 using materials already produced during Eulang due to an insufficient diversity of languages taught and the researchers, being themselves teacher trainers, could deal directly with teachers and test innovations. The experiment was piloted by 2 teaching training colleges: Kecskemet and Győr. The programme used 2 public school in Kecskemet and 5 in Győr: a total of 265 pupils from 9 – 13 years of age.

This is not the forum for a detailed discussion of the results as the period of evaluation was rather short (4 months) and Genelot (2001) considers a minimum of one year is necessary to demonstrate a significant improvement compared with a control group. The pupils participating showed a slightly greater improvement than the control and was more significant for the tasks nominated more difficult. The difference was also greater with older pupils. Given that the pupils followed the same course this can only be explained by their level of cognitive development. The difference was not great but does not contradict the initial hypothesis.

### **Conclusion**

It is not claimed that this approach is new but has developed within the perspective of linguistic policy at the European level with the emphasis now on plurilingualism. The current projects have as their objective to provide quantitative evidence for those responsible for educational policy in order to achieve the main goal: viz. the integration of this approach into the curriculum.

The results to date do not contradict the initial hypothesis and have allowed for metalinguistic development with the primary gain being in the change of attitude achieved. The pupils who have used this approach have shown an attitude significantly more 'open' toward diversity of languages and cultures than those subject to a more 'traditional' approach. In other words, they have demonstrated an attitude that is much more motivated; a prime requirement for the successful acquisition of languages.

## References

Candelier, Michel (dir.), 2003 Janua Linguarum – La Porte des Langues: L'introduction de l'éveil aux langues dans le curriculum. Editions du Conseil de l'Europe – CELV, Strasbourg, 213pp

Genelot, Sophie, 2001 Eulang – Evaluation quantitative du cursus Eulang. IREDU, Dijon

Websites for reference:

[www.chez.com/jaling](http://www.chez.com/jaling)

[www.jaling.ecml.at](http://www.jaling.ecml.at)

160  
D P63-68



Oktatási  
Minisztérium

**Special needs**  
**in the**  
**primary classroom**

