

MODERN LANGUAGES AND INTERCULTURALITY IN THE PRIMARY SECTOR IN ENGLAND, GREECE, ITALY AND SPAIN

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Abstract – *This article deals with the situation, concerns and issues related to modern language teaching and learning at primary school in three Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy and Spain) and England. It is the initial part of the work carried out in the course of a European Cooperation Project, Oxymoron (LINGUA Programme). Attention is given to the question of the optimal age for learning and acquiring languages, and to the education reforms which have been undertaken in each of those Mediterranean countries in relation to early modern language teaching and learning (EMLTL) and interculturality. Some conclusions and recommendations are drawn from this comparative study.*

Introduction

In the last years modern language teaching and learning at an early age has become more and more common in Europe in general, and in the European Union nearly all the countries are introducing them into the education of primary school children aged 8 to 11. This is mainly due to several factors related to the political needs of European unity (the official national languages must be used on a level of equality), to socio-cultural needs stemming from a growing mobility of people all around Europe, and finally to economic factors which very much influence the use of modern European languages in a growing market. This interest in early modern language teaching and learning (EMLTL) is also increasing throughout the world. A fact to be considered is that bilingualism is the norm and monolingualism is the exception for some 60-70% of the world population, as they have acquired two or more languages informally in naturalistic settings such as the family, the community, and the religious group (Johnstone 1994:4). Siguán goes even further when he says that nowadays a monolingual person only knows English – as mother tongue – and the rest of the people are bilinguals (Siguán 1996:10).

However, though there is a clear trend towards modern languages teaching and learning, the approach does not always provide learners with the preparation for a way of thinking and behaving which takes into account the foreign as something enriching; on the contrary, linguistic competence is exclusively encouraged without much attention to interculturality.

The optimal age for modern language learning

In the history of modern language teaching and learning there is a recurrent issue – the complex question of the optimal age for second and foreign language learning. Stern suggests that there must be a specification of the learning characteristics and needs of each age group before attempting to answer the optimal age question, and concludes (1983:367):

“In certain respects pre-school children, young school children, older child learners, adolescents, and adults differ psychologically in their approach to second language learning. What these differences in developmental stages are is at present not fully understood. But it appears that young children respond more readily and intuitively to language ‘acquisition’ in social and communicative situations, while older learners can learn languages more readily by means of cognitive and academic approaches.”

There is a need, therefore, to go further than the psychological aspects and consider educational, political and philosophical ones. Then, *“it may be desirable to introduce younger children to second languages even though it is not necessarily psychologically optimal”* (Stern 1983:367). And it is here where we can find a clearer base for EMLTL, as it can be considered a privileged way of presenting intercultural issues at an age when children are more permeable to other cultures and ways of life. EMLTL may be, at the very least, a way of fostering linguistic and cultural awareness, i.e. comparing the mother tongue and the other language(s) as a means of decoding cultural and linguistic similarities and differences (Poole 1995).

Consequently, despite the fact that there is no conclusive research on the subject, one could argue that there are important reasons and some advantages for starting modern languages teaching and learning at early stages. Following Stern (1983), these can be summarised in the following manner:

- Early starters have a diminishing initial superiority in speaking and listening, but maintain a later superiority in listening.
- Young children will usually be superior in terms of ultimate attainment (*younger-is-better* in the long run).
- Early school children are more able to acquire a second language.
- Young children respond more readily and intuitively to language ‘acquisition’ in social and communicative situations.
- Children are more likely to develop interpersonal communicative skills.
- Young pupils have a more social and emotional permeability to a new language and culture influence, therefore they can develop a better intercultural attitude.

Linguistic and cultural variety in the European Union

The European Communities have been promoting some pilot-projects aimed at linguistically and culturally heterogeneous classes with immigrant children since the mid-seventies. This experience is reflected in the guidelines of an important document, issued on the 25th July 1977, which states the rights of the migrants of member states to receive education in their own home language. This directive questioned monolingual schools, and it signalled an innovation away from assimilationist ideas. The European Union also introduced the expression and concept of *intercultural education*, although in the beginning its meaning was reduced to the way of dealing with migrants in schools and it was not extended to the education of pupils in cultural and linguistic diversity, independently of the presence of migrant children.

In spite of these EU directives, the member states are not only largely reluctant to implement changes, but there even is a *national turn* in some countries towards hostility against foreigners and a neo-nationalism which endangers the value of those directives. Some of the effects on language policy are a tendency to consider national languages as the centre of the national identity¹, as well as to produce language-purifying legislation, and a shift towards a nationally and culturally unifying education, instead of an enrichment coming from cultural and linguistic diversity. All this does not match the value of cultural variety and multilingualism, especially that of minorities, which the EU supposedly supports.

The EU situation can be summarised in the following four theses (Allemann-Ghionda 1995:14):

1. National educational systems agree on a policy in favour of linguistic and cultural variety, yet they are reluctant to implement it.
2. If there is implementation, then there is a gap: here, intercultural education as pedagogy of 'the poor', 'the migrant children'; there, international, European, bilingual, multilingual education for 'the rich', 'the natives'.
3. A 'national turn' appears to be taking place in some countries in Western Europe. This might cause a backlash in the field of the officially stated promotion of linguistic and cultural variety in and through education.
4. Supranational authorities try to pursue a European policy of cultural variety, but each nation-state develops its own strategies.

Moreover, the declarations of nearly all the countries analysed refer vaguely to some kind of interculturality, and consequently the main focus of their reforms is on linguistic competence. The communicative competence is then restricted to a traditional notion which limits teaching and learning to linguistic aspects, subordinating the intercultural learning, as Knapp (quoted in Vogel et al. 1996) states:

“Il ne s’agit pas de la capacité à prendre parfaitement un rôle en utilisant des moyens rhétoriques propres à la langue étrangère tel que le ferait une personne ayant cette langue comme langue maternelle, mais justement de la capacité à reconnaître et surmonter les déficits culturels lors de l’accomplissement de l’interaction. C’est pourquoi la capacité de communication interculturelle est comparable à la mission d’un ethnographe qui veut comprendre une culture étrangère en y prenant part lors de ses observations.”

In the kind of world we are living today (migrations, lack of resources and their unjust distribution, and so on), there is a tendency towards parochialism, short-sightedness, lack of tolerance towards foreigners and the foreign, and even hostility is increasing in the last years. There must be a shift towards intercultural education as a means of building more far-sighted pupils who are able not only to understand and tolerate *others*, but to widen their own values and their vision of the world through reflexivity. Linguistic and cultural knowledge can be therefore a privileged means for fulfilling this aim.

EMLTL in England, Greece, Italy and Spain

The comparison of the situation in several European countries may be a valuable element if we want to develop EMLTL, although the conditions in the countries analysed are rather different. The aims of this section, therefore, are mainly three:

- to indicate and compare the conditions of early learning in these countries;
- to review the initial and in-service teacher training and education, and
- to recognise the intercultural aspects of EMLTL.

This analysis is based on the description and analyses presented by the different national partners of *Oxymoron*² (see bibliography).

The situation in England, Wales and Scotland

There is an increasing interest at the moment in Great Britain in the introduction of foreign languages at the primary school, though in the 60s the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) presented an influential study of the early learning of French at the age of 8 and concluded that ‘younger is not necessarily better’. The new trend in the British education system is partly a result of EMLTL being implemented all over Europe.

The National Curriculum Modern Foreign Languages Report published in 1990 by the Department of Education and Science (DES; quoted by Poole 1994: 45) stated that:

"We firmly believe that it is now desirable to identify the steps which need to be taken to make widespread teaching of modern foreign languages in primary schools possible and we have noted the recommendation of the House of Lords' Select Committee on the European Communities Report to this effect."

But the report did not specify any provisions for EMLTL "not because children of this age cannot successfully learn a language but because very few teachers in primary schools are equipped to teach it" (DES 1990; quoted by Poole 1994: 45).

In spite of the lack of provision, there were about 40 Local Education Authorities (LEA) in 1994-95 (out of 125, and 21.8% of the primary schools, from a sample in a CILT survey) which provided EMLTL in a variety of ways, and some LEAs had produced guidelines, schemes of work and materials for teachers – Cornwall, Kent, Hampshire, East and West Sussex, Richmond, Surrey, the Isle of Man, Harrow and Thameside. Many other mini-schemes and language clubs have been set up by professional or amateur enthusiasts in recent years, which means that the current trend towards EMLTL has its roots in a long tradition that never, in fact, died out (Addelman 1992).

French is by far the most widely taught European language, offered in 93.5% of the schools providing modern languages. German, Italian and Spanish are offered in less than 4% of schools in the CILT sample. Finally it can be estimated that children learning modern languages are between 5% and 7% nationally and the most common starting age is 9. In the same CILT report, 106 schools offer minority community languages (mainly Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati), which is a percentage of 1%.

Concerning the qualification of teachers to teach modern languages, there are – according to criteria cited by CILT – 51% qualified, 46% non-qualified, and 3% foreign language assistants. Teachers receive training in Methodology (24%), Linguistic updating (11%) and Methodology and Linguistic updating (8%) (CILT Report 1995:7).

Incidentally, at the same time the Scottish 'National Pilot' was initiated in 1989 involving 12 secondary schools and 76 associated primary schools, where French, German as well as some Italian and Spanish were taught to children aged 11 and in the last year of their primary school. In addition to the national projects, there have been initiatives at local level, as in the Strathclyde Region scheme

which involved 24 secondary and 133 primary schools. The results attained in these national projects have given a basis for introducing a modern language from Primary 6 (age 10) and in some schools from Primary 4 (age 8) onwards (Johnstone 1994:11). Influenced by the Scottish Pilot, the Association for Language Learning called for the introduction of EMLTL at national level in 1992 (Poole 1994).

The situation in Great Britain, however, implies a significant difference in relation to the non-English-speaking countries of the European Union, especially because of the dominance of English as a world language. While in the rest of the European Union the choice of a foreign language is rather clear, as children, parents, employers and so on tend to demand English, this is not the case in Britain where children's motivation decreases when teaching and learning is only language-centred. Experiences at the primary school based on contrastive and intercultural content and activities usually foster pupils' motivation and parental support.

Several surveys and studies have shown parents' 'virtually unanimous' support for compulsory language teaching at primary schools. A case in point is a *Times Educational Supplement* report, which pointed out that (Dore et al. 1994):

"Parents wanted 90 minutes a week of teaching in French, German or Spanish, if necessary at the expense of religious education. They found similar views among industrial leaders who want primary and secondary schools to teach European languages, concentrating on oral fluency as a vital business tool (...), partially because written communication in business is more likely to be in English. Parents said that a European language would open opportunities in careers and travel for their children, especially with the increasing importance of the European Union. All children should study languages until the age of 16."

In spite of these opinions, the Government has at present no plans to introduce foreign languages in primary schools and, as there is no national policy, no regular and adequate funding has been provided. *"The present governmental position is that primary languages are an extra, in the eyes of some an unnecessary extra, in the eyes of others an attractive decoration"* (Adelman 1992). A spokesperson of the Association for Language Learning said that *"We want the Government to put in long-term planning so it does not happen in a disorganised way"* (Dore et al. 1994).

I present here a brief account of three British cases of primary foreign languages provision (based on Hornsey and Jones 1994):

LEA-supported schemes: Kent Primary French

The 'Pilot' project attracted a majority of primary schools in the county. The top-junior teachers (Year 6) had intensive INSET at the beginning which included a brief period of language tuition in France and training in methodology. Continuing INSET provides Area meetings, a supply of updated materials, access to foreign Language Assistants and the support of the full-time co-ordinator who also monitors performance. Teachers can have their work accredited on Professional Development courses (M.A., M.Ed., Diplomas) at Christ Church College, University of Kent, where the project has a high profile and interested researchers.

Independent schools

The concepts of 'early' or 'primary' language are not applicable to preparatory schools which have foreign languages from 3 to 13, as part of the core curriculum. Parents support the teaching of a foreign language, usually French.

French Clubs

These clubs are an alternative to the lack of foreign language lessons, mainly French, and are conceived as franchises on offer at approximately £500 to individuals who like French or have an adequate experience and have premises available (one's own house can be used). The organiser receives booklets, badges, stationary, and so on, and sets up weekly sessions. Lessons cost from £1.50. Organisers receive a short intensive training and an ongoing supply of information.

It is rather difficult to draw clear conclusions in such a complex situation, but in summary it can be said that LEA provision in State Schools depends entirely on whether they select EMLT as a priority and are prepared to fund it; on the contrary, EMLT is usually an integral part of Independent Schools curricula. I want to point out too the unclear definition of aims and the variable and arbitrary teaching qualifications that teachers have, and that is why outcomes are difficult to evaluate.

EMLTL in Greece

The 1985 Education Reform Law introduced the teaching of music, physical education, art and craft, and foreign languages in the primary sector. In 1987, 123 primary schools all over Greece started foreign language teaching with teachers

transferred from the secondary sector and with two foreign languages chosen: French, 33% of the schools, and English, 67%. The initial introduction of English only in the primary state sector was followed by a rather widespread teaching of English in thousands of private schools.

Early foreign language teaching started from the 4th grade (9 year-old pupils) for 3 hours a week. A year later it was extended to the 5th grade involving 295 schools, after an evaluation of the project and followed by some 'Guidelines'. Though there was no syllabus during the first two years, when one was introduced it did not have much in common with the free textbooks and materials distributed by the ministry of education. In 1992, as a new body of teachers - primary teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) - was set up, there was no need to transfer secondary school teachers into the primary sector. 972 teachers of English were appointed in that year and it meant that the only compulsory foreign language would be English from then on. At the moment there are 2053 EFL primary teachers.

These EFL primary teachers hold a four-year university degree in English Language and Literature. Some of them have participated in a three-month pre-service teacher training course; others in seminars and workshops on EFL methodology, and many of them will have the opportunity to participate in short 10-day INSET (in-service education and training) courses and seminars.

The general aims of the Primary EFL syllabus intend to help the development of young learners through foreign language learning, and some of these aims are rather significant because they stress aspects related to tolerance, positive attitudes towards other individuals or groups, interaction with others, international understanding and co-operation, and so on. Among the declared objectives one finds, for instance, the following: 'to develop...tolerance towards different characters of individuals, towards other social groups and ethnicities so that values and opinions of other people can be understood and appreciated for the benefit of communication and cooperation'; 'to facilitate communication and interaction among people from all over the world with different mother tongues'; 'to achieve a wider and deeper understanding of life and the way other people think'.

EMLTL, however, still encounters a considerable number of problems as it has only recently started in the state school sector in Greece. The main problems refer to the lack of sufficient teacher training, particularly in the rural areas, and to the shortage of ELT advisors. In addition, English teachers have a teaching commitment of approximately 24 to 25 hours per week in 5 to 7 schools; the number of pupils can be as high as 30 per class, and there is lack of audio-visual aids and libraries.

EMLTL in Italy

Early foreign language teaching in Italy has changed in the last ten years after the issue in 1985 of the document known as *Educational Programmes For Primary Schools*, which included a foreign language in the primary curriculum. Since then EMLTL was considered part of the linguistic and cognitive educational package, and, in particular, the aims attributed to a foreign language are as follows:

- to aid and enrich cognitive development, offering another skill for organising knowledge;
- to allow children to communicate with others through a language different from their own;
- to begin the child's process of understanding other cultures and peoples through linguistic skills (Ministry of Education 1985:27).

The last two points pay attention to cultural understanding and communication between peoples and cultures.

The Italian Ministry of Education was rather flexible as regards the choice of the language to be included in the school curriculum, but they had a clear preference for English:

"The choice of this or that language is not decisive. The language may be chosen, keeping in mind objective criteria of social and cultural utility, as well as the requirements of the community... Above all, the universal character of English must be taken into account, inasmuch as it offers more frequent possibilities of experience" (ibid.:27).

The 1985 Reform was considered a very important innovation, though its implementation did not happen until 1992-93, beginning with the 3rd, 4th and 5th classes. The guidelines that it followed considered the optimal age for starting a foreign language at seven (though where there was a lack of trained teachers it was possible to start at eight), the distribution of lessons should be 'in not more than three blocks of not more than one hour each'; the teacher should be one assigned to the primary school, who freely chooses to teach a foreign language, opting to carry out the function of a 'specialist' (i.e. who only teaches that subject), or a 'specialised' teacher (i.e. who teaches a foreign language as well as other subjects), and the introduction of EMLTL took place only in schools with teachers trained in courses offered by the Ministry of Education (which only meant 22.5% of pupils in 1992-93).

In addition, the Reform outlined some methodological orientations, but these were only considered as recommendations rather than as rigid prescriptions, and

it is the teacher who has to adapt them to the children's needs, rhythms and styles of learning, as well as to the demands and characteristics of the community. These orientations recommend that teachers follow the sequence *comprehension-assimilation-production*; that they give the lessons initially in *oral form*, with the written language being introduced gradually; that they introduce linguistic considerations later with not only a functional character but also that of comparison between the first and the second language; and that they use such *motivational and play activities* as posters, drawings, masks, puppets and marionettes, as well as individual and group games.

Foreign language learning is recommended to begin from the second class (7 year-olds) and the choice may be between French, English, Spanish and German. A study by the Ministry of Education highlighted the strong preference for English, a significant but much less popular preference for French, and a lower demand for Spanish and German (except in the region of Trentino Alto Adige, where, following a deeply rooted tradition of bilingualism, German has been a second language for some time).

The initial training of Italian primary teachers in a foreign language, in spite of the reform in course, has an important limitation. Teachers only study another language at secondary school and at the pre-university teacher training colleges (4 years). However, they already have a good knowledge of primary pupils and their needs, as well as an adequate methodology for the primary school, when they start their in-service foreign language training. In Italy, therefore, it has been necessary to organise in-service training courses for EMLTL teachers. Such courses have undergone several changes along the years: at the moment, there is a 500-hour training course over two years which deals with the following main areas: interpretation of the foreign language programme; putting into practice of interdisciplinary connections; organisation of teaching; methodology, teaching skills, planning aimed at research and experimentation, and development of linguistic ability.

Though the primary school teachers selected for the teaching of each of the four foreign languages had until now the choice of becoming either specialist or specialised teachers, the latter options seem to be the most popular in the Italian context, as it allows a better integration of modern languages in the school curriculum. Both kinds of teachers have 22 hours of face-to-face teaching and 2 hours of planning with colleagues.

In summary, the main problems and concerns of the Italian EMLTL are related to aspects such as the dominance of English which conditions the extension of the other modern languages; the limited availability of teachers and their uneven distribution throughout the country; and the need for further in-service training and teacher training materials. In addition, modern language teachers have to face

the challenge of interdisciplinary planning with the school teaching team, and have to deal with the diversity of teaching methods that are employed by modern language teachers, and those used by teachers of other subjects. Finally, there is a lack of teaching materials. When these are available, they are generally quite expensive to purchase, and in addition often need to be adapted.

The situation of the Spanish Primary state sector

Foreign languages have acquired greater importance in teaching children from the age of 8 years upwards, as a result of the recent educational reform (1990). The main reasons have been social pressure and demands for language learning at a younger age, as well as indirect support coming from the field of general education.

In theory, Spanish schools should offer at least two optional languages, French and English. In reality, however, primary school children only have one foreign language available – most usually English – secondary students continue studying the same foreign language, though they can have an optional second foreign language – usually French.³

Though the foreign language is not considered in the first stage of Primary Education (6-7 years), the curriculum is flexible enough to allow it to be taught if desired and there is provision for it. It is considered a required subject in the second and third stages of Primary Education (8-9 and 10-11 years), which means 3 years earlier than in the old system (at 11). Today practically all the children between the ages of 8 to 12 years study a modern language, generally English. The Spanish Ministry of Education and the Autonomous Communities have defined the timetable for every area of the primary curriculum, but it is essentially advisory. However, the timetable allows for 3 hours a week in almost all the Autonomous Communities. Only communities such as Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country, Navarre, the Balearic Islands or Valencia – where two languages are spoken – allow for minimum changes in certain years.

The 1990 Reform envisages learning a language as a means of communication, not simply as acquiring a signal system, but also understanding the cultural meaning that these signals carry. This explains the reason for adopting a communication-based approach which, in itself, includes different subdivisions: linguistic, pragmatic, socio-cultural and strategic competencies. Pupils should be able to *say something to somebody with a purpose*, three key elements in foreign language teaching. So, learning a language should go beyond a grammatical or functional approach, however important that might be, to language as a means of expression used by an entire culture, a way of understanding and coding reality and a means of organising interpersonal relationships.

The objectives of teaching a foreign language in the primary education should be, according to the Spanish Reform Law, to develop in the pupils abilities related to the oral and written comprehension and production, as well as abilities related to non-verbal communication (gestures, body language, and so on). Two objectives refer clearly to culturality, as for example: 'to show a positive attitude to understanding and respect towards other languages, their speakers and their culture', and 'understanding and using linguistic and non-linguistic basic conventions used by foreign language speakers in everyday situations of social interaction'.

Three areas are established in foreign language teaching by the Reform Law – oral communication, written communication and sociocultural aspects – which are integrated by concepts, procedures and activities, as well as attitudes and values. I present here the objectives of the sociocultural area, the one most related to EMLTL and interculturality.

The conceptual objectives refer to 'social and cultural aspects of interests to pupils, which are particular to the countries where the target language is spoken' and 'presence within Spain of the target language: trademarks, songs, films, etc.'. The procedural objectives are related to 'recognition of certain sociocultural aspects particular to countries where the target language is spoken', 'comparing the most relevant everyday aspects, which are particular to the countries where the foreign language is spoken, with aspects that take place every day in their own country', and 'use of realia'. The attitudes to be fostered are 'evaluation of socio-linguistic behaviour which facilitates coexistence in situations mentioned before' and 'desire to know people from other countries (correspondence with children from other countries, etc.)'.

Initial primary teacher education in Spain belongs to a first degree of university studies at Teacher Training Colleges. Since 1991 the new teacher training programmes include a special field for foreign language teachers (English or French), which qualify them to teach children from 6 to 11 at the primary school. The programme includes common subjects directed towards the prospective teachers' psycho-pedagogical, methodological and cultural education (common to the other primary studies), as well as the foreign language, phonetics, methodology, literature, and school practice.

EMLTL in Spain faces a considerable number of practical problems and the main ones - identified in the conclusions of a primary teachers' forum held in 1992 - can be summarised as follows: there is a lack of trained specialist teachers in Primary EMLTL (as teachers used to be trained for 11 to 14 year-old pupils); teachers are reluctant to change; teachers are generally not allowed to attend seminars during working hours; there is a lack of team-work, which is necessary to produce cross-curricular syllabuses. In addition, there is a lack of published

materials especially designed for Spanish pupils, or of open-ended books which allow both teachers and learners to creatively incorporate their own initiatives (e.g. tasks, project work, free practice, etc.). There is a need to develop topic-based syllabi, and task-based learning activities. Teaching would thus be based on a series of related tasks which allow children to develop their language skills in a meaningful way. Last but not least, the primary teachers' forum noted that the educational reform had not been presented in a clear and schematic way, and the result was that many teachers felt confused.

Conclusions

The analysis and the comparison of the situation in these four European countries provide us with a better understanding of the needs and concerns in EMLTL, as well as of the relevant issues. Some general conclusions can be drawn from this comparative study.

In the first place, there is a clear tendency towards the introduction of a modern language in the primary school, in general from 8 or 9 years of age, even though there is no defining national policy, as in the case of England and Wales. However, in all the countries analysed, EMLTL is mainly subject-based instead of being embedded in the school curriculum, and in two of the countries is taught by peripatetic teachers. This reinforces subject orientation and consequently generally fails to lead to a cross-curricular approach.

Secondly, where an educational reform is being implemented, objectives related to linguistic and cultural awareness and diversity – one of the basic aspects of EMLTL – are insufficiently presented and contextualised. The main references are reduced to 'respect' and 'tolerance' and do not include interculturality, and hence there is not enough emphasis on the widening of pupils' values and vision of the world, through a reflexive approach to their own language and culture as compared and contrasted to the target language and culture. Teacher training and education on interculturality is still lacking and the content and the materials do not often present real aspects of cultural contrast and reflection, are frequently superficial, and do not propose real communicative activities and tasks.

In the third place, the countries analysed present a different approach to teacher training and education in EMLTL, but the main trend is towards a university degree. However, there are several ways of becoming an EMLTL graduate teacher: an English-studies degree (Greece), or an education degree in a foreign language (Spain). This raises important issues, given the cross-curricular nature of primary teaching.

In the fourth place, there is great tendency towards restricting EMLTL to English. This limits linguistic and cultural awareness, and consequently interculturality. In addition, some European Union countries are following a kind of ethnocentric linguistic policy that endangers the promotion of linguistic and cultural variety.

Finally, there should be a linguistic and cultural policy that recognises not only the minority languages in each European state but also those of migrant communities from outside the EU, as well as the cultures of their countries of origin.

There are also other aspects to take into account if we want to improve education systems (see *Encuentro* 1993). In the first place, staff development should be continually assessed, from initial training right through in-service training. It should favour educational research in classrooms and schools, giving a priority to collective discussion and reflection regarding both the school and other educational institutions, encouraging and promoting collaborative working groups. Secondly, it is important to carry out an evaluation of the extent to which guidelines laid down by educational reforms are actually implemented in the primary education sector. Such an evaluation would facilitate the identification of weaknesses in the educational process, particularly if the exercise involves students, parents, social institutions and other partners. Finally, there should be an important increase of expenditure on education, rather than a restriction of budgets which effectively jeopardises any reform.

Notes

¹ This intention was clearly expressed by the British Minister K. Baker who declared that the English language 'is the essential ingredient of the Englishness of England' (quoted by C. Jones and K. Kimberley, 1991: *Intercultural Perspectives on the National Curriculum for England and Wales*, London: University of London, Institute of Education, p. 17).

² Oxymoron is a European Cooperation Project (funded by the LINGUA/SOCRATES Programme), composed of teams of researchers and teacher researchers from England, Greece, Italy and Spain. It started to work on the relationship between EMLTL and interculturality in September 1994. The analysis of the situation in those countries was the initial work carried out by the four national partners.

³ Only two Autonomous Communities, Canary Islands and Navarre, have already introduced, as a pilot scheme, a second foreign language to those who are presently in the 7th year (12-13 year-olds, the beginning of the secondary education). Most certainly this is due to developments in the tourist sector or in order to advance further in a subject which is only considered as optional in the secondary education system.

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