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Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Urmia University

Setting up Whole-school Policies and Practices through a Symbiotic Approach to Language Matters

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ABSTRACT

A whole-school approach to foster competences for democratic culture, described by the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, implies the active involvement of all actors in three areas of school life: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the community. The European Centre for Modern Languages' project *Des environnements d'apprentissage optimisés pour et par les langues vivantes (EOL)* similarly assumes that a whole-school approach is essential in the promotion of plurilingual and intercultural education in schools. The article illustrates the EOL project: the core principles of its approach, the tools, materials and examples of practices. The project and its follow-up activities have proved that setting up language learning friendly environments requires decisions at different levels so as to introduce mechanisms and routines. Considering language education as a key factor for social cohesion, the aim of the article is to answer the question of what schools should do so as to go beyond a one-off, isolated project to unite all stakeholders around a shared language plan for school, which fosters competences for democratic citizenship.

Keywords: whole-school approach; holistic strategy; global citizenship; language-friendly learning environments; educational policies; social cohesion; digital literacies

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 7 Feb. 2022

Revised version received: 23 May 2022

Accepted: 10 Sept. 2022

Available online: 1 Oct. 2022

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10.30466/ijltr.2022.121228

Introduction

When we look at languages within the school curriculum of any learner or class, the perception we have is that languages are isolated one from the other, each being like a subject with its own space and time, but in our personal language repertoires, languages combine and never operate in isolation one from the other. This is just one example of the many “disconnections” which exist in language education. Discontinuity in language learning for individuals, hierarchy between languages, different methods of teaching in different languages, lack of cooperation between language classes and subject classes, can turn into obstacles in a learner’s career.

The project EOL – Learning environments where modern languages flourish

The concept of “language learning environment”, which was developed within the project EOL (the acronym is modelled on the French name of the project “*Des environnements d’apprentissage optimisés pour et par les Langues vivantes*”¹) funded by the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (Austria), is a key to start facing and solving disconnections at all levels in language education. In the project glossary² one of the definitions of “learning environment” is that it:

refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. The term also encompasses the culture of a school or class – its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another – as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning.

Starting from that definition and using the work of Britta Hufeisen (2011) we developed our notion of “learning environment” based on the combination of three components, culture, structures and people:

- *culture* includes aims, values, content, objectives, intentions, approaches, etc.
- *structures* are all the organizational aspects of a school (funding, schedule, timetables, equipment, spaces, resources, etc.)
- *people* refers to learners, teachers, parents, school principals, school support staff, inspectors, policy makers.

The three components are always interrelated.

This article presents and illustrates how the different tools and resources of the EOL project can be used to address three challenges which are posed to any educational context today, i.e. social cohesion, mobility and digital literacies. The purpose is to show how a holistic and systemic approach to language education can be used to create a learning environment in which languages matter. In a retrospective analysis, we shall show how the three challenges, which are crucial to living in a democratic society, can be formulated in terms of competences for living in a democratic society and culture by drawing upon the *Reference Framework of Competence for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) (Council of Europe, 2018). Identifying the competences clarifies and provides a basis for analysis of the demands made on those involved, a first step to ensuring that there is successful management of the process as a whole.

Towards a holistic approach to language education

The EOL project team worked with a network of schools in different countries and at different levels. The dialogue with this network brought to the fore various forms of disconnections in language teaching and learning, e.g. the isolated approach of each language in the curriculum, the lack of continuity in language learning for individuals, the failure to take into account all the learning spaces. Often schools are able to start excellent projects in different areas of language education, but they may result in isolated outcomes and sometimes conflicting interests and efforts. With these disconnections in mind the team became increasingly aware of the importance of implementing a systemic vision of plurilingual and intercultural education. The collection and analysis of information made in many schools in Europe revealed the need to reconsider the framework of language teaching. The notion of learning environment then imposed itself with its systemic dimension.

A holistic strategy and a symbiotic approach in language education

A strategy is needed in language education if we want to overcome all existing disconnections in language education policies and practices at school so that the plurilingualism of the individual learner is taken into account. The strategy we espouse stems from the Council of Europe's representation of languages in education which makes visible the interconnections between languages: between modern and classical languages, home and school languages, foreign and minority languages, and the language(s) in which other subjects are taught.

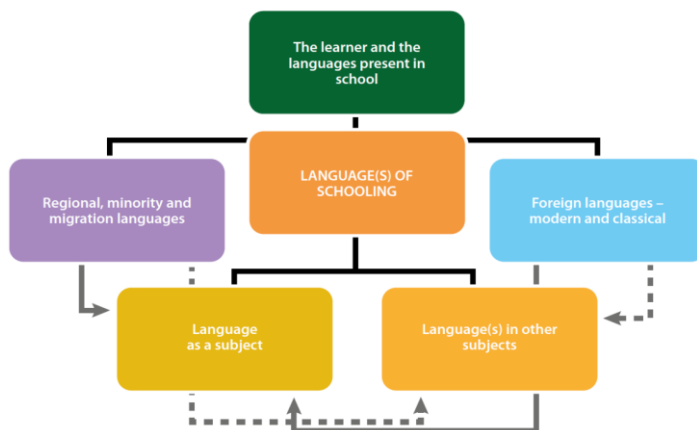


Figure 1. Platform of resources and references for Plurilingual and intercultural education <https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education>

The EOL project is based on this view of the plurilingualism of the individual and the key role of language education with respect to recognising learners' language competences and acknowledging the part played by language in all learning, which means that language education is or should be placed at the very heart of all education policies.

In the vision of EOL project, all the different levels in any education system can be linked and coordinated for and through language education. We distinguish five levels: nano (learning languages), micro (teaching languages), meso (languages in the school management), macro

(language policies in the educational system) and supra (international educational policies). The five levels must all converge consistently towards a common, global approach to language education, based on a shared awareness of the role of languages in all learning, and especially in the promotion of democratic citizenship and social cohesion.

In order to realize this strategy, EOL promotes a symbiotic approach to language education, meaning the mutual support and interaction between three components of any learning environment: culture, structures and people, as defined above. We based our approach on language learning environments on two definitions:

Definition 1:

Developing a total learning environment for students in a particular course or program is probably the most creative part of teaching. While there is a tendency to focus on either physical institutional learning environments (such as classrooms, lecture theatres and labs), or on the technologies used to create online personal learning environments (PLEs), learning environments are broader than just these physical components. They will also include: the characteristics of the learners, the goals for teaching and learning, the activities that will best support learning, the assessment strategies that will best measure and drive learning the culture that infuses the learning environment. (Bates (2019) Appendix 1: Building an effective learning environment, A.2 What is a learning environment?)

Definition 2:

Learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. [...] The term also encompasses the culture of a school or class – its presiding ethos and characteristics, including how individuals interact with and treat one another – as well as the ways in which teachers may organize an educational setting to facilitate learning...”. (Great Schools Partnership, 2013)

In order to build and support an interaction between culture, structures and people, we designed various tools and developed concrete resources, which stakeholders at all educational levels can use to design language learning environments which do justice to learners’ plurilingualism and to the role of language in all learning.

In order to illustrate the project and show how tools and resources can be used to promote the creation of language learning friendly environments, we have chosen three challenging aspects of modern education: mobility, digital education and social cohesion. We then address these specifically in terms of promoting global citizenship through international cooperation, fostering digital citizenship in the alternation between in-class and remote learning, and supporting learners’ agency through language education as a key factor of social cohesion. For each aspect, we highlight the main mechanisms in a language education action plan at a whole-school level. We have chosen this level so as to show how it is possible to motivate and involve all the actors of a school community using language education as a transversal asset to enhance better communication, deeper understanding and stronger social interrelations, which are all key aspects of democratic competence. We shall then elaborate on the key mechanisms and use the RFCDC as a means of identifying desirable competences and outcomes.

1. Promoting global citizenship through international cooperation

International cooperation and the mobility of teachers and learners across geographical and cultural boundaries, contribute to the development of various competences noted in the RFCDC, e.g. empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, learning autonomy, knowledge and critical understanding of the world. However, mobility programs are often just added to the regular curricula by individual initiative instead of being integrated into a whole-school education project. Such an integration requires – especially in the context of school exchanges – a cross-curricular approach among teachers, a deep cooperation with school partners abroad and a global planning of the mobility option as part of the learner’s learning pathway. This in turn may imply the delegation of decisions regarding the learner’s school career, the recognition of the skills acquired through mobility and, more generally, the sharing of common educational objectives and values. All these aspects represent a challenge for school management.

The network of EOL schools overcame the traditional isolation of international programs and promoted an integrated cooperation. The EOL tool *School partnership and mobility* helps schools to assess and enrich their partnerships, including methods in which students learn systematically with partners. It includes two grids with action points: a) Developing reciprocal classes and b) Valuing and using mobility.

Key mechanism #1: Fostering mutual support

The symbiotic principle fosters mutual support among individual stakeholders, among schools as institutions and within networks. It locates intercultural and international partnerships, transfers, interconnections, etc. at the heart of education techniques, management and policies. As such, it multiplies opportunities for personal and professional development in and through languages.

The concept of EOL promotes the principle that all teachers are language teachers. This does not mean science teachers are expected to teach language but they should be aware that the language they use plays a vital role in letting learners comprehend the subject they teach. Language and communication are very relevant to all subjects. Developing a differentiated response to the specific needs of all learners requires cooperation among teachers. EOL helps the school management to carry a whole-school approach on language education and support communication and understanding between teachers on language matters. Language education paves the way for collaboration, transversality and team spirit among teachers. The example below shows an important part of what symbiosis means. A subject teacher felt concerned about the need for real life use of English as a foreign language. He gave his students the opportunity to use English as a communicative language with European partners on scientific projects. The use of digital devices and apps gives the opportunity to extend the communication opportunities. This dynamic offered school management new perspectives on the way to involve parents in school communication. All levels are addressed here: learning (nano), teaching (micro), managing school (meso), fostering innovation in language policies (macro) and setting up a communication system (supra).

Example 1:

In the lycée Le Dantec in Lannion (France), an upper secondary school in Brittany, a biology teacher wanted to offer systematic opportunities for using English in real life situations during his Biology classes. The students had to shoot a video report with tablets and use geolocalization apps during a school trip to Wales to find evidence of the common geological history of Brittany and the UK.

This common work with a Welsh partner school gave him the idea to offer more systematically real life use of English in his biology class.

He set up an Erasmus+ Project with partners from Portugal, Iceland, Germany and the Czech Republic where students explore the countryside in Europe and try to find information about a scientific project in biology or geology. In the Azores archipelago for example, students investigated with the help of local students the properties of Aloe Vera. The information is shared with partners and parents through the online web sticky note service LINOit and valued on the school's website.

Key mechanism #2: Promoting synergetic relationships

Reciprocity often generates synergies. By sharing issues, reinforcing networks, fostering interconnections, EOL develops a culture of partnership where mutual support can be asymmetric as long as each partner gains, since contributing to the success of partners also impacts positively on one's own issues and supports creative solutions. Example 2 illustrates how cooperation often allows the emergence of common solutions to shared challenges or innovative approaches to specific problems. The students of the partner class are here "co-teachers" who support their own autonomy.

Example 2:

In 2010 the inspectors at the Académie of Rennes (France) and the Land Brandenburg (Germany) were looking for ideas to revitalize their partnership and the teaching of the partner's language.

In this region in the east of Germany, many French teaching staff were former Russian teachers. These older teachers had real experience of teaching different languages and cultures but were quite reluctant to use digital tools in their class.

In Rennes, language teachers have great experience in networking because language teacher training is based on local networks. In these so called "réseaux de mutualisation" teachers had the chance to work together but also to reflect on the use of digital tools in the language class. The inspectors were looking for a way to introduce intercultural mediation.

Setting up a direct cooperation platform between these two regions gave the German and French teachers the opportunity to exchange experience and to allow their classes to work together in concrete mediation situations. French and German students discovered their partner's language together via Internet communication and learnt how to value their own language(s) and culture(s) when supporting partners. They searched for learning material, set up challenging tasks, motivating subject teachers to participate, etc.

The RFCDC helps to analyze the relationship between academic knowledge and social abilities. The RFCDC's key descriptors help schools to speak a "common language" with their partners. Associations, firms, institutions can more easily understand their educative role if the outcomes of a common project with the school are formulated through the RFCDC's key descriptors. Volume 2 of the RFCDC provides the key descriptors for each competence through three levels: basic, intermediate, advanced. They include competences which are specifically oriented to living in a democracy, such as skills of cooperation and conflict resolution. This means that the co-operation skills referred to above and developed in the project can be further defined with the help of the RFCDC. The table below can be used therefore to clarify the skills expected to develop in international educational alliances.

Table 1
Using the RFCDC to Foster Local and International Educational Alliances

16. Co-operation skills

94	Builds positive relationships with other people in a group	Basic
95	When working as a member of a group, does his/her share of the group's work	
96	Works to build consensus to achieve group goals	Intermediate
97	When working as a member of a group, keeps others informed about any relevant or useful information	
98	Generates enthusiasm among group members for accomplishing shared goals	Advanced
99	When working with others, supports other people despite differences in points of view	

Key mechanism #3: Assessment and the use of the RFCDC

Recognizing successes, even intermediate ones, is important both for each individual and for the institution as a whole. This means that giving a quality label to a school's language policy should be seen in combination with the enhancement of individual language proficiency and language repertoires, both for learners and teachers and support staff.

The EOL provides a number of indicators with which to assess the quality of the language learning environment and a labelling system which deals with the procedure needed for a quality label. There are three phases: identification, recognition and quality control. Together, indicators and labelling show how to support an integrated cooperation between partner schools through the recognition of the competences acquired during mobility programs.

Docimology is the theory of testing. Assessment can have a great impact on the relationship between teachers and learners, especially when it comes to link proficiency scales and grading. Through docimological research on assessment (Knight and Cooper, 2019; Lopez, 2013), we know that it may be very difficult for most teachers and learners to master an assessment scale with more than four levels. Therefore, the RFCDC's three levels can be adopted as a transversal approach to assessment by all teachers in all subjects.

Table 2*Using the RFCDC to Develop Skills in Conflict Resolution***17. Conflict-resolution skills**

100	Can communicate with conflicting parties in a respectful manner	Basic
101	Can identify options for resolving conflicts	
102	Can assist others to resolve conflicts by enhancing their understanding of the available options	Intermediate
103	Can encourage the parties involved in conflicts to actively listen to each other and share their issues and concerns	
104	Regularly initiates communication to help solve interpersonal conflicts	Advanced
105	Can deal effectively with other people's emotional stress, anxiety and insecurity in situations involving conflict	

2. Fostering digital citizenship in the alternation between in-class and remote learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020-21, the transition to remote schooling revealed how much learning can take place outside our classrooms. Yet, teacher training continues to be designed around in-class teaching. Ignoring what a student acquires outside school means denying part of the student's identity. This is particularly true for language education where it is not only a question of taking into account all the languages which are in the learner's language repertoire – including the family languages which are not taught at school – but also of considering the development of literacies which now include the ability to use digital skills in communication. Language is at the very heart of the development of digital citizenship³, on condition however of adopting a holistic approach to language education in the combination of in-class and remote teaching and learning.

The following examples show the key questions, how to find the best way to combine in-person class or synchronous remote teaching with asynchronous remote teaching.

Example 3:

During the containment due to the pandemic, most decision makers focused on the difference between face-to-face and remote teaching because of safety reasons. Yet time plays an essential role when it comes to lesson planning. This is why teachers fostered continuity of learning by combining in-person class or synchronous remote teaching with asynchronous remote teaching.

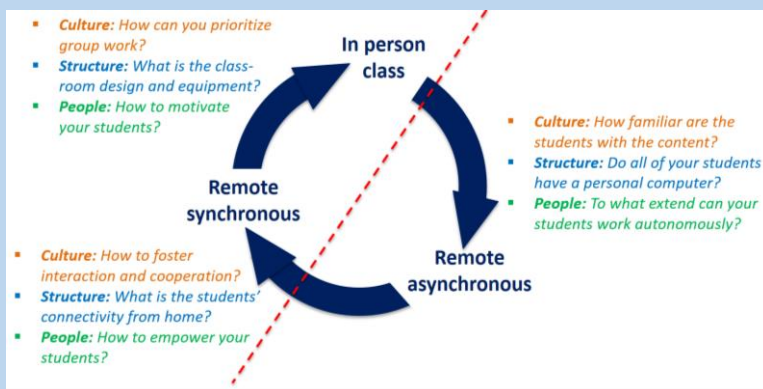


Figure 2. J. Erin, 2019, Key questions to find the best way to combine in class and remote learning sessions

The pandemic highlighted the schools' social function in terms of safety and social cohesion.

Example 4:

In order to limit dropouts and disruptions many schools of the EOL network used the following list of priorities, challenges and levers schools might use to set up their own hybrid strategy.

Priorities	Challenges	Levers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - foster digital equipment and Internet connection - support digital literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - overcome social and digital divide - bring together central and local education policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use online platform to support parental education for example on accessing to information and identifying fake news
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support flexible teaching when students are splitted into different groups: remote at home ; face-to-face in the classroom ; in another classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - successfully transition from remote learning environment to face-to-face teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support both: subject centered training and cross-subject project approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use all learning fields and areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - connect informal, formal and non-formal learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer short project based class sequences

- design flexible learning environments combining space and time	- link synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning	Train teachers to overlap partly face-to-face and remote teaching and focus on time
- train students in interaction and mediation	- foster individual and collective agency	Make all stakeholders contribute to the mediation function of schools
- foster scaffolding on learning instructions	- develop a deeper understanding and motivation	Set up a plurilingual education including language(s) of schooling
- promote democratic citizenship	- address the needs of the young generation	Involve students in decision making through chats, forums, social networks, surveys, padlets, etc.

Key mechanism #4: Networking

The school's social function can be supported through local and international cooperation. Schools appear to be major hubs to foster social cohesion and promote the combination of formal and non-formal education. Furthermore, they play a major role to help young people interrelate with each other and with peers from other countries. Project-based approaches can foster togetherness and a sense of belonging among all actors in a school's network.

Linguistic diversity offers great opportunities to address citizenship in the form of intercultural experience. The EOL (2019) document *Cooperation between the school and its surrounding territory* investigates how to use language education in order to develop cooperation between the school and its local environment. The suggestions are based on the work with our EOL partner schools.

The EOL (2020) toolkit *Intergenerational language education in times of confinement and beyond* builds a framework for e-learning with five entries – time management, space management, new relationships, language matters, innovative learning environment – including various proposals to identify and value the skills acquired by the students at home, through gaming activities or with flipped classroom approaches for example.

The RFCDC describes the behavior of civic-mindedness which can be used to explain what underpins a school's relationship with the communities in which it exists.

Table 3

Using the RFCDC in Establishing Citizenship Behavior

6. Civic-mindedness

33	Expresses a willingness to co-operate and work with others	Basic
34	Collaborates with other people for common interest causes	
35	Expresses commitment to not being a bystander when the dignity and rights of others are violated	Intermediate
36	Discusses what can be done to help make the community a better place	
37	Exercises the obligations and responsibilities of active citizenship at either the local, national or global level	Advanced
38	Takes action to stay informed about civic issues	

Key mechanism #5: Combining

This is how the Council of Europe defines the aims of digital citizenship education:

To communicate, learn, work and play responsibly in this environment, they need to develop a whole range of competences that will enable them to harness the benefits and opportunities and overcome the pitfalls they will encounter. This is the goal of the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education (DCE) programme: to provide young citizens with innovative opportunities to develop the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary for every citizen to participate fully and assume their responsibilities in society.

Interrelating with others, moderating (social) networks, sharing challenges, engaging in a mutual exchange process etc. are very much linked to the mechanisms we describe here under "combining".

Symbiosis is the process which underpins mutually beneficial relationships. Identifying (existing or newly launched) means to promote such relationships is essential to involve all actors in a midterm perspective. This includes for example the way foreign language teachers can help other teachers to move towards language sensitive teaching and reciprocally learn from them how to enrich the learning content they offer to their students.

The EOL provides a tool for doing this. The *TrEOL* is a card game that can be played to start identifying challenges in terms of strengths and priorities. It is a tool for teams. By connecting two triangles – one for the strengths, one for the priorities – teams can identify and discuss new strategies to set up language friendly environments and efficient language learning. An online version of this tool can help to set up an interactive team discussion in order to identify and agree on a common strategy based on the connections between the school's strengths and priorities.

Languages are situated at the heart of human resource management. The EOL tool *Mutual exchange of skills* motivates the team to set up skills exchange programs. It lists competences and experiences (the offer), and to collect requests (the needs) within the school community.

Giving learners a voice when it comes to project management or even to changes in school life is an opportunity to combine knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness of the democratic process. This approach helps the inclusion of younger generations and deepens the sense of belonging through discussions, debates, consensus, transparency, etc. All of these entries refer to some extent to communication strategies. Digital tools, platforms, services and networks offer larger opportunities to carry out the learners' voice. Therefore, democratic expression should be considered as central as self-efficacy, creativity, etc. in digital citizenship education.

The descriptors from the RFCDC for "tolerating ambiguity" contribute to this process. They lead to a better valuing of singularity and diversity that are key elements for a successful inter-generational dialogue. Learning how "to be comfortable in novel situations", finding out how "to cope with ambiguous situations", understanding how "to tolerate uncertainty" are all key mechanisms in intercultural encounters. In digital learning environments the inter-generational dialogue might have to cope with different digital cultures on digital literacy, language registers, sociolinguistic routines, etc.

Table 4

Using the RFCDC to Change the Relationship between Teachers and Learners

9. Tolerance of ambiguity

50	Engages well with other people who have a variety of different points of view	Basic
51	Shows that he/she can suspend judgments about other people temporarily	
52	Is comfortable in unfamiliar situations	Intermediate
53	Deals with uncertainty in a positive and constructive manner	
54	Works well in unpredictable circumstances	
55	Expresses a desire to have his/her own ideas and values challenged	Advanced
56	Enjoys the challenge of tackling ambiguous problems	
57	Expresses enjoyment of tackling situations that are complicated	

Key mechanism #6: Transferring

Innovative approaches are part of the resilience expected from schools and their capacity to adapt to new challenges, but innovation is often limited to a specific area or group within the school community. The way an innovation can be transferred to a whole-school level or adapted from one school context to another is part of an action plan from the very beginning.

The EOL tool *Transfer of Projects (ToP)* helps in setting up a transfer procedure: learning from others and transferring a project from one context into another. It lists many relevant questions in relation to getting started, getting informed, identifying key aspects, setting up a strategy, cooperating, disseminating and adding value.

Chapter 5 of Volume 3 of the RFCDC offers a process-based description where school governance and culture plays a central role to “Establish inclusive and participative decision-making structures and procedures, including powers for teachers, students and parents in setting agendas and participating in policy decisions, for example through representation on school boards and working parties, focus groups or consultations.”

The transfer tool can thus be complemented by the analysis of structures and setting of agendas.

3. Supporting agency through language education as a key factor of social cohesion

The notion of agency, both individual and collective (Bandura, 2001), finds its roots in the definition given by the *Common European Framework of Reference - Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) of the learner as a social agent:

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 168)

As Cavalli and Coste (2015, pp. 6-7) suggest, social agency can greatly contribute to social cohesion:

The social agent's mobility allows him or her to participate in and move between social groups (or communities). It is through this participation and movement that social agents first encounter, in the form of perceived otherness and distance, opportunities and subject-matter for, and experiences of, learning and personal development. Mediation, for which different agencies are responsible and which mainly takes place through language activities, seeks to facilitate the different aspects of this process: supporting mobility and rendering it more free-flowing; approaching and reducing or appropriating otherness; gaining access to, integrating with and participating in communities, possibly having recourse to social networks. The agencies in question, from social agents themselves to institutions, have responsibilities to bear in this process, the exercise of which involves, among other things, acts of mediation.

Learning environments should never be self-contained spaces. The diverse interconnections can help to make them suitable for complexity and flexibility. Making learning environments more adapted to modern language education enhances interconnections and fosters individual and collective agency.

Working on a whole-school approach in the EOL project made the schools modify to some extent the relationship between students and adults by giving control to the learner. This has clearly an impact on the use of languages by giving learners more opportunities to become language users in real life situations. Here are examples of opportunities for students to take over real responsibilities developed by EOL schools. The RFCDC also addresses the importance of building “resilience to radicalization leading to violent extremism and terrorism” (Vol.1, p. 12). “Valuing cultural diversity” which is one of the values competences in the RFCDC model provides a clear definition of what engagement of learners with their local community may mean and the emphasis on the variety of language repertoires within a school community is one of the best ways to foster inclusion and share common values.

Table 5
Using the RFCDC to Strengthen the School's Social Function

2. Valuing cultural diversity

7	Promotes the view that we should be tolerant of the different beliefs that are held by others in society	Basic
8	Promotes the view that one should always strive for mutual understanding and meaningful dialogue between people and groups who are perceived to be “different” from one another	
9	Expresses the view that the cultural diversity within a society should be positively valued and appreciated	Intermediate
10	Argues that intercultural dialogue should be used to help us recognise our different identities and cultural affiliations	Advanced
11	Argues that intercultural dialogue should be used to develop respect and a culture of “living together”	

This is how one school of the network of EOL schools took up the challenge of fostering the learner's agency.

Example 6:

In a Maynooth general education secondary school for students aged 12-18 in Ireland, a teacher set up an after-school language club called *Home-in-Language* to encourage students to engage more dynamically with their home languages.

This project targets simultaneously:

- The learners: the project highlights the students' full language repertoires and supports the independent use of all languages including home languages.
- The school: the project expands the school's language offer and celebrates language diversity and intercultural mediation.
- The community: the project engages parents and former students to volunteer as mentors to support language learning and liaises with the local university by inviting ERASMUS students to support the project objectives and enriching cooperation with other European countries.

By giving students a connecting role, the holistic approach of the Home-in-Language project fostered individual and collective agency through languages. As intercultural mediators, ERASMUS students contribute explicitly to the social cohesion of the class, the school and the community.

Key mechanism #7: Co-operating

A shared diagnosis is the entry point of every common project and all actors should agree on the existing strengths and the targeted priorities of the school's language policy. In order to foster EOL as a global approach, the team designed an "environmental matrix" to which every stakeholder can refer. This matrix was designed by combining human ecology and language acquisition theories (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Herdina and Jessner, 2002; Hufeisen, 2010). *The EOL-Matrix* gives an overview of different fields and helps schools to articulate the different levels at each step of a school's action plan. The art of linking the different fields and areas of the matrix grid is the key to the symbiotic approach which leads to a language friendly learning environment.

Sharing a common diagnosis about the learning environment helps learners, teachers, staff members, parents and partners discuss intercultural and plurilingual communication needs. This requires the RFCDC's "skills of listening and observing", and not sharing the same language might require an effort of cooperation and the support of other members of the school community. As above the definition and listing of levels of attainment in the RFCDC (Volume 2) provides the basis for analysis in detail of the skills developed.

Table 6*Using the RFCDC to Support Cooperation and Enrich the Identification of the Learners' Needs*

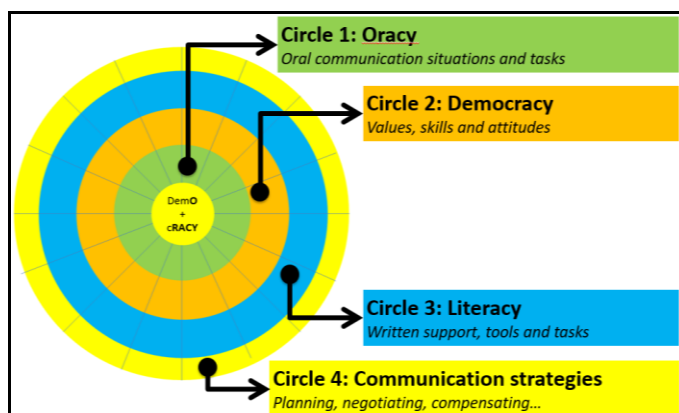
12. Skills of listening and observing

70	Listens carefully to differing opinions	Basic
71	Listens attentively to other people	
72	Watches speakers' gestures and general body language to help himself/herself to figure out the meaning of what they are saying	Intermediate
73	Can listen effectively in order to decipher another person's meanings and intentions	
74	Pays attention to what other people imply but do not say	Advanced
75	Notices how people with other cultural affiliations react in different ways to the same situation	

Key mechanism #8: Sharing common goals and values

Especially in culturally diverse school communities, agreeing on essential values helps to combine energies and make people want to come together as an intercultural community.

The *DemOcRACY* tool below helps schools find various combinations to develop oral skills and competences for democratic culture. The principle is to rotate four circles until you get the combination that you think is the best for meeting your learners' needs. It can be used individually or by a team of teachers.



Classroom debates contribute to both the motivation of students and the use of languages in context. Classroom debates make it possible to use and enrich content from other disciplines; particularly within an intercultural perspective. The aim of the project, developed by the French history and geography teacher of the course "Moral and Civic Education", is that through classroom debates the learners acquire a moral consciousness that enables them to understand, respect and adhere to and share the humanistic values of solidarity, respect and responsibility. By using the competence descriptors from the RFCDC a teacher can make students aware of the importance of both values, attitudes and strategies. The profile shows elements of strength and weaknesses. By using self-reflection and specific action research activities it is possible to

encourage learners to work on their weaknesses so as to improve them. In the following table, the RFCDC analyzes different levels of the attitude of ‘Openness to cultural otherness’ which teachers and learners can use to analyse their attitudes in a detailed way, using the three levels.

Table 7

Using the RFCDC to Create Understanding of Diversity and Otherness in Communities

4. Openness to cultural otherness

21	Shows interest in learning about people's beliefs, values, traditions and world views	Basic
22	Expresses interest in travelling to other countries	
23	Expresses curiosity about other beliefs and interpretations and other cultural orientations and affiliations	Intermediate
24	Expresses an appreciation of the opportunity to have experiences of other cultures	
25	Seeks and welcomes opportunities for encountering people with different values, customs and behaviours	Advanced
26	Seeks contact with other people in order to learn about their culture	

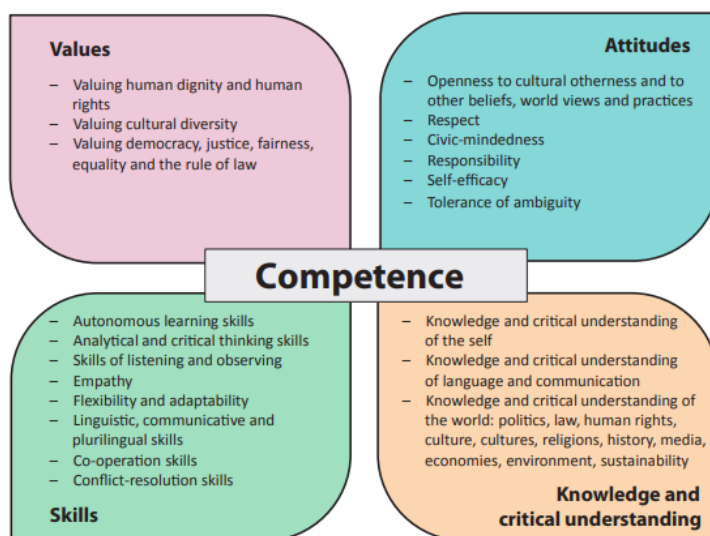
Key mechanism #9: Managing

Project management is a central element when designing and running an action plan. This includes motivating people, setting up a communication plan, monitoring the whole process, etc. *The EOL planning flowchart* supports schools in planning their action plan. Through the challenge “How to define the process of whole-school education policy?”, a school in Nova Gorica (Slovenia) set up a global action plan based on three major themes:

- The school's strengths in language education.
- Three points to start from in order to set up an efficient language learning environment for and through language education.
- Key features of the school about language education.

In many school systems, academic knowledge is isolated from social skills, values and attitudes. Beyond the single items and their descriptors, the RFCDC's butterfly approach, which combines skills, values, attitudes and knowledge paves the way for a global view on what a whole-school strategy should be. The combination of skills, values, attitudes and knowledge can build a transferable framework for training plans.

The RFCDC “butterfly”



Model of Competences for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2018)

In order to overcome the academic approach which is still strong in any school subject a global approach should be promoted. A good starting point to reformulate a school curriculum around this objective could be a focus on which specific competences in terms of skills, values, attitudes and knowledge are built within the different school subjects. The training plan should be conceptualised and developed for a long time so as to have time to evaluate the mastery of social skills of the learners.

Conclusion

Designing learning environments means fostering interconnections. Working on language learning environments in particular gives a clear and comprehensive idea of the complexity of educational policies and provides an overview of different language issues. To make the approach consistent it is necessary to combine cultural, structural and personal aspects. EOL suggests a new ecology for language education which takes into account all levels of education and highlights the mediating function of schools.

EOL is based on a factorial approach to plurilingualism which leads to a holistic analysis or central matrix. This matrix should be a tool to which all stakeholders can refer when looking for new interconnections to be developed within their own context. EOL is flexible enough to lead every school to specific context related solutions.

Linking different fields, combining factors, associating actors, taking into account different needs and addressing all levels of education contribute to a symbiotic approach which develops individual and collective agency. The combination of policy, pathway and settings – namely a whole-school approach to languages, continuity of languages learning and the development of a favorable language learning environment – increases the impact of language education.

Giving learners a social role in school by passing on responsibilities in various fields of education – communication, partnerships and networks, intercultural mediation, project management, etc. – can create ideal settings for language education.

Because of its flexible nature, the EOL project contributes to widen the diversity of the foreign language offer: It develops the international opening of schools, the intercultural opening of teachings and the linguistic dimension of all subjects and accelerates the digitalization of education. Because of its systemic nature the EOL flexible concept is transferable to other domains where a change is necessary to overcome any disconnections/discontinuities and to innovate; such as school management, professional development, education policies.

The holistic approach of EOL project to language education also includes science education. As pointed out, all teachers in EOL concept are considered language teachers. Teachers of all subjects are expected to be aware that the language they use plays an important role in students' understanding of the subject they teach. Language and communication are very important for all subjects. Students are growing up in an increasingly technologically and scientifically advanced world and need to be scientifically literate. They need to learn how to think, learn, communicate, solve problems and make decisions. These skills are integral to all aspects of a student's education and life, from school to career.

In summary, EOL approach offers new ways to support language and educational policies which take into account the real needs of actors at all levels of education systems and value the role of each.

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¹ See the program 2016-2019 of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). The name of the project in English is "Learning environments where modern languages flourish".

² <https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2016-2019/Learningenvironmentswhereforeignlanguagesflourish/Concept/tabid/4257/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

³ Digital Citizenship Education is part of the work of the Education Department within the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe. It targets policy and decision makers, educators and parents. The ECML project *E-lang citizen* currently focusses on the development of digital citizenship through language education.

<https://www.ecml.at/ECML-Programme/Programme2020-2023/Digitalcitizenshipthroughlanguageeducation/tabid/4302/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>