

European Trade Union Committee for Education



European Parents Association

Successful language learning

2001 EPA-ETUCE Declaration of Reykjavik

There is an increasing need for language skills in society, both for personal enrichment and in the world of work, but also in support of openness between cultures and individuals. Today, communication skills are among the most important requirements in the labour market, as globalisation and international exchanges are rapidly developing.

In Europe, the linguistic and cultural diversity forms part of our common heritage, which must be promoted. A cultural dialogue and mutual understanding are fundamental elements in the European democratic citizenship.

Free mobility of ideas and people are rights that depend on better language skills. Lifelong learning requires the development of the teaching and learning of modern languages. Mastering foreign languages are to young people an important element in their vocational education and training and in their transition from school to the world of work.

We, parents, teachers and other staff in education welcome the decision of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament to declare 2001 as the European year of languages. We are aware of our current and future responsibility for the promotion of an intercultural attitude among young people, including in particular language learning.

Language, culture, society

- Everyone has to be able to speak, read and write the language mainly used in society in order to be able to work and participate in the cultural, social and political life of that society. This underlines the right of every child to learn the majority language of the society where he or she grows up.
- Everyone has the right to maintain his or her cultural identity. Languages are a crucial part of every culture. This underlines the right of every child to learn his or her mother tongue, including when the mother tongue is not the majority language of the society.
- Everyone must learn to respect other cultures and have a basic knowledge about different cultures. It is also important to learn to appreciate the diversities in a multicultural society. Another crucial task is to learn to settle conflicts without violence and in a spirit of mutual respect. This underlines the need for an education about human rights and democracy. These skills will support the development of mutual respect and contribute to combat any tendencies of racism and xenophobia. Teaching of culture is organically linked to teaching of languages.
- In compulsory education systems, all pupils/students should learn two foreign languages. Such language skills are essential to be able to meet and communicate with people from other countries and cultures, to travel and to work and live in another country.

One element of lifelong learning should be language courses for adults. Such courses will strengthen parents' and teachers' ability to support and encourage the children's/pupils' learning of languages.

EPA and ETUCE propose:

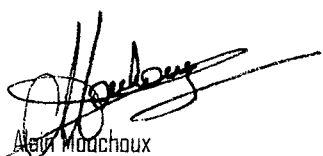
In order to fulfil these objectives, governments, regional and local authorities have a leading role to play. Obviously, the national governments are responsible for their education and training systems, but the EPA and ETUCE proposals are to a large extent also relevant to the EU level, to be implemented where appropriate, through the Socrates, Leonardo, Youth and other programmes. For foreign language learning, the following measures should be taken:

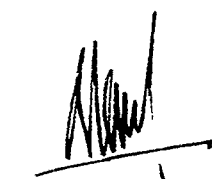
- The awareness of the general public with regard to the importance of foreign language knowledge should be raised.
- Parents and teachers are important role models, and information should take this into account.
- The cultural dimension should be more emphasised when informing about language learning.
- Education strategies should be developed in order to intensify and diversify language learning.
- Language learning in early childhood education should be developed.
- Language ability should be improved by interdisciplinary approaches.
- Didactics and methodologies in modern language learning should be developed.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) should be taken into account and offered as a support and encouragement to learning.
- Development of educational research with regard to foreign languages (didactically and pedagogically)
- Exchanges and language learning visits should be encouraged.
- Language courses in another country should be encouraged and developed.
- Schools should make more use of exchange teachers of different cultures as native speakers.
- Teachers should be offered an improved initial education and continuous professional development that take into account the changes in society and schools, particularly those due to ICT.
- Teacher education must be of a high quality to ensure that quality in schools can be constantly improved. Teachers should be offered opportunities to learn methods of self-evaluation.

The different partners must share the responsibility in the language-learning project.

- The pupils by means of their open-mindedness towards the learning of foreign languages and the knowledge of foreign cultures.
- The parents and the teachers, aware of the importance of language knowledge, should encourage and inspire the child's language learning by fostering the child's language interest and abilities.
- The authorities at the different levels have the responsibility to provide financial means, the legal framework and the mechanisms for evaluation.

This text has been accepted by the Bureau of ETUCE (21 November 2000) and EPA Executive Committee (11 November 2000) and signed by the persons present in Reykjavik on 26 November 2000:


Alain Mouchoux
Assistant to the General Secretary
ETUCE


Dominique Bariller
President
EPA