

## Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

# Luxembourg case study report 4 Revising the Language Curriculum for a Multilingual Society

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The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

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The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
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## **Revising the language curriculum for a multilingual society**

The Government Programme plans to readjust language teaching. This initiative has been considered as the linguistic situation has become more and more complex and sensitive, due to an extremely varied immigration. However plurilingualism of the resident population is recognised by authorities as an asset that should be maintained, the baseline of the country's competitiveness and a cultural enrichment.

In the educational system of Luxembourg, the number of hours of language teaching is high and implies a teaching rethink within a sustainable change of the educational system. The readjustment of language teaching is linked to a set of measures and projects initiated since some time. It is the cornerstone in the essential modernisation of the school in Luxembourg.

### **Rationale and Aims**

The initiative has been considered in the national context where the linguistic situation – due to immigration - has become more and more complex and delicate. Implementing the government program, the Ministry of Education and Research of Luxembourg is involved since autumn 2004, with all the parties involved in school life, in a large thinking process on what should be implemented to improve on a permanent basis the language teaching system within the education system in Luxembourg. The main objective for teenage is to qualify them more and better by avoiding that the requirements as regards languages do not become an insuperable barrier to get a professional and school qualification.

The project is based on 4 main objectives:

- Create a dynamic of the parties involved in school life around the targeted objectives and strategies to be adopted in linguistics (“communicative part”).
- Specify the targeted objectives and linguistic skills at precise schooling time (“curricular part”).
- Implement concrete actions in education (“practice part”).
- Implement training and research measures for a language teaching readjustment in Luxembourg (“reflexive part”).

### **Description, Implementation**

The plan of action defines 66 measures dispatched into four parts linked together. These are an important number of actions, which must be seen as a whole and converge to bring change; their implementation should be done in cooperation with teachers.

#### ***Communicative part (measures 1-9 from the plan of action)***

The objective of the plan of action is not to stipulate to teachers how they must do their job but to give them a direction and a framework to synergic actions which should converge to bring some changes. To this end, the ministry plans an information and a dialogue approach to make every partners adhere to it (teachers, departments, parents etc.) to the measures put forward.

### ***Curricular part (measures 10-12)***

To define clearly and coherently the objectives and contents of language teaching, this is the objective of the curricular work. Defining the core language skills is the main point of the plan of action. Defining this base will be done according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. As regards the assessment, language skills will be assessed - on top of a holistic score – through a well-balanced assessment to evaluate written and oral expression, written and oral understanding. For the start of the new school year 2007/2008, the ministry puts forward a supplementary model to the report taking into account these 4 skills. As self-assessment tool and progress literature, the European Language Portfolio will be introduced as an experiment in several schools at the start of the new school year 2007/2008 with a view to spread it. The section of the Plan dedicated to the curricular part also puts forward some actions to open up teaching subjects to enable a real transfer of knowledge, skills and learning strategies.

### ***Practice part (measures 13 - 54)***

Too many pupils have some lack in written understanding. The plan of action puts forward some measures aiming to globally improve text understanding, to all the levels of the scholar system. Offering lessons of excellence for motivated pupils is part of it as well as the strengthening of helping measures for pupils having some reading lack.

Other actions more specifically concern the promotion of Luxembourgish, Portuguese, English and Latin. A specific importance is granted to the learning of Luxembourgish during preschool education by implementing a concept of systematic observation of the child.

As regards English, the Plan of action puts forward some measures to promote this language throughout the schooling to post-primary education.

#### *Examples of planned actions:*

##### **Action 34**

To manage the heterogeneity of the school population, the school in Luxembourg found several means and the school offer is now more varied. We can mention for an example the “International Baccalauréat” project, the “Lycée Schengen” project, the class with a specific linguistic system for the East and the French-speaking vocational and technical trainings targeting mainly newly arrived and foreign language pupils.

##### **Action 35**

The existing welcoming and support measures for the newly arrived are strengthened, notably within the activities of the Welcoming school unit for those just arriving. To be able to follow classes, those pupils have the opportunity to acquire the necessary linguistic competences before being put in a regular class. From now on, they will benefit from an education tailored to their needs and targeted so as to develop their master of languages after joining a regular class.

On average, school performances - including those in languages - are more determined by the socio-economic origin of pupils than by their linguistic context. If the actions recommended in the Plan of action are for all the pupils, some will mainly benefit to less-privileged pupils, notably the speech development during preschool and primary education, strengthening the learning to read, the differentiation possibilities.

### ***Reflexive part (measures 55 - 66)***

Since the University of Luxembourg has been created, the education system in Luxembourg can boast of having a great reflexive system. It will be necessary to intensify the activities in

educational research, scientific support and assessment of education projects, quality assurance of schools, etc. At the same time, it will be necessary to make sure that the results of research undertaken have some consequences on initial training and continuing education of teachers.

It will be necessary to focus on the collection of empirical data, which will enable to adjust language teaching. It will also be necessary to see to the creation of exchange places between research, expertise and use to develop a structured communication, an open and fruitful cooperation between the responsible and the users of the education system on one side, and the researchers of the University of Luxembourg on the other side.

First, the Plan of action will have to modify the interaction terms between the Ministry and the teachers, involve more and on a permanent basis the intermediate bodies, the college of inspectors and directors, but also the University, and at last find a new hub to increase the dialogue with teachers, reach the parents and the circles concerned. At the curricular level, to define skills and the base of skills will clarify and specify the objectives and thus give some common references to the various partners of the school community. To implement any school reform will imply experience, knowledge, know-how, commitment and creativity of actors who know the terrain. Therefore the Plan of action means to support and highlight local projects (grass-root projects) and also spread the information and right practices. Finally the Plan of action wants to set up some exchange places between research, expertise to increase the effectiveness of the educational system and to locate the school debate in the field of facts.

The Plan of action incites teachers to rediscover the importance to manage heterogeneous levels and situations they might have in their classes. In this way the place granted to languages in education will mirror more faithfully how the society is made and its evolution. Pupil, who will be able to use and promote their mother tongue, what they can bring will no longer be considered as another hindrance but as an enriching opportunity.

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training has given the responsibility of -by contract and in agreement with the “*Département Jeunesse du Ministère de la Famille et de l’Intégration*”<sup>1</sup>, the “*Centre d’études sur la situation des jeunes en Europe*”<sup>2</sup> (CESIJE) - writing the National Report. The measures of the Plan – coordinated by the Ministry - is intended for various subgroups, in particular members of study groups, to coordinators in schools, to teachers and those in charge of school management and school inspectorate, etc.

## **Evaluations, Outcomes and Recommendations**

A common procedure is being examined to implement the Plan’s assessment and its scientific support. This approach will mainly focus on international standards: usefulness, feasibility, adequacy, accuracy, etc.

In 2007 and 2008 a certain number of sporadic appraisal inquiries are carried out. Their aim is double: on one side, to collect some data to channel the decisions and measures at the sensitive spots of the educational system and on the other side, to develop the methodology.

Along with the University of Luxembourg (UREMACS), the analysis and interpretation of data from the “*Test de connaissance du français*” (TCF) will be deepened. The test of the third inquiry PISA (Programme International pour le Suivi des Acquis des Élèves) will have a crucial role for the overall assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Department of the Ministry for Family and Integration

<sup>2</sup> Study Centre on Teenage Situation in Europe

The Luxembourg has for the first time participated in – in accordance with the governmental convention from August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004 - the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) study of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

## References

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