Background document

Outline of the document
“State of the Art on Multilingualism and Education”

Prepared by UNESCO’s Education Sector

for the expert group meeting
“Towards UNESCO guidelines on Language Policies:
a Tool for Language Assessment and Planning”

30 May – 1 June 2011
I. Introduction

The present text has the objective of enriching the debate at the expert meeting “Towards UNESCO Guidelines on Language Policies: a Tool for Language Assessment and Planning” and informing about the “Educational kit formulating a holistic language policy” which will be developed at a later stage. The document is divided into four parts: introduction, Multilingualism and education, State of the Arts and findings, and Annex.

With the expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the rapid development of transportation, we are exposed to cultural and linguistic diversity on a daily basis through the media, the Internet or in our immediate environment. In other words, we live in multicultural societies and may be exposed to multilingualism. As a consequence, there is a better awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity but this is not necessarily viewed in a positive way.

A number of documents on this issue are cited with a view to outlining UNESCO’s advocacy work and its normative role in the area of languages in education.

To address the issue of preserving diversity and/or the need for a better recognition of and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, UNESCO elaborated the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001. Its Action Plan includes the following measures:

- **Safeguarding the linguistic heritage of humanity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages.**
- **Encouraging linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age.**
- **Promoting through education an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education.**
- **Incorporating, where appropriate, traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge.**

Even earlier in 1993, UNESCO was aware of the need to address emerging challenges linked to language, society and education in the 21st century; the Organization commissioned a report “Language policies for the world of the 21st century” with recommendations to UNESCO, to Governments and to Non-Governmental Organisations and other Institutions.
Echoing the recommendations made in the 1993 study, the UNESCO General Conference adopted a resolution, “Implementation of a language policy for the world based on Multilingualism” in 1999 with recommendations to UNESCO Member States.

The strategies from the recommendations concern many domains of public life including education.

*The General Conference Recommends* that Member States:

(a) create the conditions for a social, intellectual and media environment of an international character which is conducive to linguistic pluralism;

(b) promote, through multilingual education, democratic access to knowledge for all citizens, whatever their mother tongue, and build linguistic pluralism; strategies to achieve these goals could include:

   (i) the early acquisition (in kindergartens and nursery schools) of a second language in addition to the mother tongue, offering alternatives;

   (ii) further education in this second language at primary-school level based on its use as a medium of instruction, thus using two languages for the acquisition of knowledge throughout the school course up to university level;

   (iii) intensive and transdisciplinary learning of at least a third modern language in secondary school, so that when pupils leave school they have a working knowledge of three languages - which should represent the normal range of practical linguistic skills in the twenty-first century;

   (iv) an assessment of secondary-school leaving certificates with a view to promoting a grasp of modern languages from the point of view of communication and understanding;

   (v) international exchanges of primary- and secondary-school teachers, offering them a legal framework for teaching their subjects in schools in other countries, using their own languages and thus enabling their pupils to acquire both knowledge and linguistic skills;

   (vi) due attention in education, vocational training and industry to the potential represented by regional languages, minority languages, where they exist, and migrants’ languages of origin;

   (vii) availability to teachers and education authorities of a computerized network, including a database, to facilitate exchanges of information and experience;

   (viii) the establishment of a national and/or regional committee to study and make proposals on linguistic pluralism in order to initiate the necessary dialogue between the representatives of all professions and all disciplines so that they can identify the main lines of a language education system which is adapted to each country but which also facilitates international communication, while preserving the rich and inalienable linguistic and cultural heritage of humanity;

(c) encourage the study of the languages of the major ancient and modern civilizations, with a view to safeguarding and promoting a literary education.

Aware of the importance of promoting cultural diversity through education, UNESCO convened an expert meeting on intercultural education in 2003; the outcomes of the
meeting is the publication of the UNESCO “Guidelines on Intercultural education” with its three principles

Principle I: Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.

Principle II: Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.

Principle III: Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations.

II. Multilingualism and Education

One of the major UNESCO’s mandates is education; the Organization is the lead agency for the Education for All initiative. With around 68 million out-of-school children in the world today (the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report of EFA 2010) and the language factor contributing to this situation, UNESCO continues encouraging Member States to manage diversity in all domains of public life through the development of multilingualism and multilingual education.

It is an urgent question to address for UNESCO as the Organization is committed to the realization of everyone’s right to education without discrimination or exclusion.

In 2009, the Joint Expert Group UNESCO (CR)/ ECOSOC (CESCR) on the monitoring of the right to education held its tenth meeting at UNESCO Headquarters on the theme: “Multilingualism, mother tongue and the right to education” with focus on the legal framework.

In the report, Multilingualism is addressed:

“The UNESCO Education Position Paper on education in a multilingual world (2003), which sets out three basic principles are considered to be pertinent in terms of policy formulation. The Joint Expert Group is of the view that in our globalized world, it is important to promote multilingualism for educational exchange, business, general communication and for the broader strategy of EFA.

Multilingual education is defined by UNESCO as the use of at least three languages in education:
- the mother tongue or first language
- regional or national language
- an international language”

The UNESCO Education Sector latest strategy document concerning “The role of languages in reaching Education for All (EFA) in the context of sustainable development” (2009) and its decision was submitted to the UNESCO Executive Board for approval.

The “importance of languages in education for all” is stated at the beginning of the document:

Basic education – from early childhood to adulthood – both formal and non-formal, must deliver quality education for all (EFA) learners by taking a multilingual approach,1 which has great potential for achieving EFA in that it:

(a) facilitates access to education – while promoting fairness – for population groups that speak minority and indigenous languages, in particular girls and women;
(b) raises the quality of education and learning achievement by laying emphasis on understanding and creativity, rather than on rote and memorization;
(c) strengthens the cognitive aspect of learning by ensuring, through use of the mother tongue, that what is learnt is applied directly in the learner’s life;
(d) increases dialogue and interaction between the learner and the teacher by providing the opportunity for genuine communication from the outset.

III. State of the Art

UNESCO official documents such as the UNESCO Education for All National Plans, the International Bureau of Education (IBE) National Reports and Planipolis are used to undertake internal review of UNESCO Member States’ plans/policies/approaches on education. These are reliable sources of data as education plans and policies are from UNESCO Member States. Plans from EFA database and Planipolis for example show Member States commitment to achieve the six EFA objectives and the Universal Primary Education component of the Millennium Development Goals (see six EFA objectives in Annex)

A few countries with educational plans were selected from regions of the world, on the basis that their plans integrate relevant approaches in terms of management of diversity. This can translate in the:

- Recognition of and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity;
- Provision of holistic policies that promote multilingualism in particular multilingual education

Holistic is used in the sense of covering all domains of public life such as administration, education, media, and the judicial system.

Findings from X number of plans (to be filled in by 29 May 2011)

- IV Annex
- EFA goals
- Web links to EFA National Plans, IBE National Reports and Planipolis (is a portal of education plans and policies)