

My name is David Curtis.

I represent only myself.

The reason for my interest is that I was a primary-school teacher from 1948 to 1988, and came to realise that even British children, having learnt a world language from birth, still need to have a second language.

I wish to respond to the question of the competencies which should be provided to children of the European Union.

In 1965, when I had been a primary-school teacher for fifteen years, a national experiment was set up for five years in the teaching of French to primary-school children. I polished up my schoolboy French, learnt between 1938 and 1943, by leaving my young family in my parents' hands and spending three months on a university oral course, in Besancon, France, speaking French not only during the course, but also in my digs and at week-ends, while skiing or caving.

Then I returned home and taught French for five years, the aim being to provide English children with another world language. But the experiment was shelved, for French was too complicated. That left the children with no second language until they reached the secondary school. By then I was bursting to provide them with an alternative, and the only one I'd heard of was Esperanto, but everyone said it had died out.

By chance I read: "Once again the Associated Examining Board has refused the British Esperanto Association's request to include the language in the General Certificate of Education." That was a revelation to me for it meant that Esperantists were organised in Britain, and that the reason the language was not heard of was that the language-teachers involved in conducting the only prestigious examination in foreign languages for school leavers were suppressing knowledge of Esperanto. That annoyed me, so I wrote for information and soon began a correspondence course which lasted two years, resulting in a Diploma in Esperanto.

Since then I have tried and tested the language all over the world, from Belgium to China, and made hundreds of friends from scores of countries. But although I and many other enthusiasts have been campaigning hard, we cannot get the powers that be to establish Esperanto in schools. The language teachers resist it contemptuously, and foreigners prefer to learn English even though the vast majority of them fail in doing so.

The only hope is that there is growing hostility in Europe to the domination of English, and it is becoming more and more obvious that the European Union is being held up by not having a common language, for, despite all attempts over a long period, only a small minority of students succeed at learning English. The majority are in the same position as the children in the national experiment in which I was involved, over thirty years ago.

I began teaching Esperanto classes and correspondence students in 1980, but it was only in 2003 that I started on Internet.

Back in 1974, when I took up the cudgels on behalf of the Esperanto movement, I could see that the language would keep me busy for the rest of my life, particularly during my retirement.

To bring you completely up to date, I should add that the Universal Esperanto Association has dropped its claim that Esperanto should become the world's lingua franca. Instead, the Esperanto movement now promotes the use of Esperanto in primary schools as an easy introduction to learning foreign languages in the secondary school. The Esperanto Association of Britain has produced an excellent scheme called "Springboard to Languages", details of which are available on <http://www.springboard2languages.org/home.htm>

I have translated the website into Esperanto and sent it to Drs L. and J. Molnar in Hungary, who have renamed it "Lingvolanchilo" (Language Launcher) and persuaded representatives of the Esperanto movement in all European Union countries to translate it into their own languages.

As that has been done, all that is lacking is encouragement from the European Union. I realise that it has no power over the education systems of its member states, but its officials are perfectly capable of encouraging ways forward if they wish to do so. I fear that they will consult the leaders of teachers of modern languages, and in every country the latter will close ranks against an imagined foe, and do all they can to suppress the teaching of Esperanto.

They do not realise that, as their school departments will grow because more children will want to take the easy option of learning Esperanto, their salaries will increase. Furthermore, once children have learnt Esperanto, very many of them will have an appetite for learning national languages. The result will be that in future, the vast majority of EU-citizens will be competent in the same second language, and far more of them than at present will be competent in a third language: one of the many European Union languages. Communication is vitally needed by the European Union.

This is blindingly obvious to me, and yet I was no more than a simple, primary-school teacher, and shall be 81 on Christmas Eve, 2007. I appeal to the many people in power in the European Union, who are far more intelligent and more highly educated than I am, to provide the Union with a neutral common language, accessible to the vast majority of its citizens. English is fine for people like me, but I have been learning it since 1926. What about my fellow citizens in other countries of the European Union? Are they going to be obliged to spend years trying to master the language my mother taught me in my cradle? Are they going to be taught different national languages as first foreign languages? Or are they going to be taught the same second language, Esperanto, which is so much easier than any national language that far more citizens of the European Union will be able to communicate with one another than ever before?

Yours sincerely,

David R. Curtis.

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