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**European Strategic Framework for Education and Training
(ET 2020)**

**LANGUAGE LEARNING AT PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL: MAKING IT
EFFICIENT AND SUSTAINABLE
A POLICY HANDBOOK**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is primarily directed at Member State authorities and administrations in charge of early childhood education and care and of language education. It is also aimed at those specifically involved in the development of language education (e.g. curriculum developers, teacher education and research institutions) and frontline staff involved in the delivery and support of Early Language Learning (ELL) (pre-school managers, teachers, pedagogues and child carers). It can also provide guidance for parents and community stakeholders.

The handbook is based on the work of a group of national experts convened by the European Commission to debate current needs and issues in the field of pre-primary language awareness and acquisition. Rather than presenting new policy proposals by the European Commission, it contains a set of guidelines and recommendations, derived from the exchanges of experiences in the above group of national experts. These guidelines and recommendations reflect examples of good practice and academic evidence on how to ensure the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of language learning in pre-primary settings, i.e. in any kind of setting (nursery, kindergarten, etc.) where learning takes place before primary school.

The purpose of this handbook is to draw attention to the conditions for success — and potential pitfalls — of early language learning by furthering the debate and proposing tried and tested solutions.

2. BACKGROUND

The Barcelona European Council of March 2002 called for action ‘*to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age*’¹, making this the main objective of EU language education policy.

The key role of languages for EU integration has been confirmed by several policy statements in the last few years:

- The 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on *key competences for lifelong learning*² highlighted the link between communication in different languages and intercultural skills.
- The Council Resolution of 2008 on a *European strategy for multilingualism*³ stressed the importance of language education from a lifelong learning perspective.

¹ Barcelona European Council (15-16 March 2002), Presidency conclusions, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf.

² Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning, OJ L 394 of 30.12.2006, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>.

³ Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism, OJ C 320, 16/12/2008, p.1–3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:320:0001:01:en:HTML>.

- The Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training ('ET 2020')⁴ referred to the *strengthening of linguistic competences* as one of the requirements for achieving high quality, efficient and equitable education systems.
- Lastly, the 2010 Communication *An agenda for New Skills and Jobs*⁵ once again identified language skills as a key competence for life⁶.

Pre-school education in general has been the object of increased attention in recent years: with the aim of unlocking children's potential, in 2009 the EU Education Ministers set a target that by 2020 at least 95% of children aged between four and the age in which compulsory primary education starts should participate in early childhood education⁷.

3. WORKING METHODS, SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

In the framework of the implementation of 'ET 2020', in 2009 the Commission set up a group of national experts from 28 countries and 30 education systems⁸ on Early Language Learning (ELL). Following the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)⁹, the group met to discuss and exchange knowledge and good practice, developing the guidelines presented in this policy handbook¹⁰.

The group set up two sub-groups on the following themes:

- early teaching of a second/foreign language,
- early teaching of the language of instruction and of a second language to children with a minority or migrant background.

The group reviewed a selection of EU policy documents, statistical surveys and academic literature and used a questionnaire to collect data on how ELL is organised

⁴ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), OJ C 119, 28/05/2009, p.2-10, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:01:EN:HTML>.

⁵ Communication from the Commission of 23 November 2010 on An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment, COM(2010)682, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6328&langId=en>.

⁶ 'Basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning: IT skills, foreign languages, technological culture, entrepreneurship and social skills', Lisbon European Council (23-24 March 2000), Presidency Conclusions, p. 9, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm.

⁷ Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:119:0002:0010:EN:PDF>.

⁸ Austria, Belgium (French Community and Flanders), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia, United Kingdom (England and Scotland), Norway, Turkey, Switzerland.

⁹ Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism, OJ C 320, 16/12/2008, p. 1-3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:320:0001:01:en:HTML>.

¹⁰ See detailed group mandate in [Annex](#).

and practised in the participating countries, identifying specific features, strengths and weaknesses, and highlighting examples of good practice¹¹. These examples have been monitored and evaluated at Member State level in accordance with the principles of evidence-based policy and they have been discussed with the group. Some delegations also provided additional analytical or academic contributions.

The main conclusions, which were drawn from the delegations' contributions, scientific expertise and examples, were summarised in a working document that provided an initial analysis of the key issues and suggested tentative guidelines. The working document was followed by a more structured and detailed progress report, which finally led to the present operational Handbook.

The scientific evidence in support of the conclusions of the Handbook is referenced in the Notes. The examples of [good practice](#) and the [country summaries](#) can be viewed via these hyperlinks.

3.1. Scope

This Handbook covers issues relating to language-learning activities for children in formal and non-formal settings¹² before primary school.

The Handbook does not look in detail at issues such as the choice or number of languages to be fostered in young children. Without prejudice to the general Barcelona target, a pre-primary context focuses more on the holistic development of the child and on close involvement of the family/community.

The Handbook complements the work of the group looking at mother tongue as a basic skill, a key competence in the context of the Open Method of Coordination. However, issues concerning the support of mother tongue competences are not part of the group's mandate.

3.2. Definitions

For the purposes of this Handbook, the concept of 'foreign language' referred to in the Barcelona conclusions is understood in a broader sense, corresponding to the 'target language' defined below.

'Early Language Learning (ELL) at pre-primary level' means systematic awareness-raising or exposure to more than one language taking place in an early childhood education and care setting in a pre-primary school context.

'First language/mother tongue' means any language first acquired by a child.

'Language of instruction' means the dominant language formally used in the pre-primary school setting.

¹¹ See '[examples of good practice](#)' and '[country summaries](#)'.

¹² In non-formal settings, parents arrange for and pay the services directly to the care-giver. There is no organized structure and no notion of qualified staff.

'Second language' means the language of instruction for children with a minority background, if it is different from their first language/mother tongue. It means the language of instruction in the case of children with a migrant background. In multilingual countries, it means the language of instruction when it is different from the children's first language/mother tongue.

'Foreign language' means any language used in the pre-primary school context other than the first language/mother tongue, the language of instruction or the second language.

'Target language' means any language other than the first language/mother tongue used in the pre-primary school context. The term can cover both the second language and the foreign language.

4. THE BENEFITS OF ELL

Opening children's minds to multilingualism and different cultures is a valuable exercise in itself that enhances individual and social development and increases their capacity to empathise with others. ELL activities in pre-primary settings can be an enriching experience and bring considerable benefits. They are instrumental in enhancing competences such as comprehension, expression, communication and problem-solving, enabling children to interact successfully with peers and adults. They can increase powers of concentration and strengthen self-confidence. As young children also become aware of their own identity and cultural values, ELL can shape the way they develop their attitudes towards other languages and cultures by raising awareness of diversity and of cultural variety, hence fostering understanding and respect¹³.

Young children's second/foreign language acquisition is similar in many ways to the acquisition of their first language/mother tongue, which is natural and effortless. Experts agree that there is a 'critical period' for developing one's first language/mother tongue, beyond which it is less likely to occur with ease. The same tends to apply in the case of second/foreign language learning. An early start is therefore essential to gain native-speaker levels of competence, particularly in pronunciation and intonation¹⁴.

Starting to learn a second/foreign language early can help shape children's overall progress while they are in a highly dynamic developmental stage in their lives. Starting early also means that learning can take place over a longer period, which may support the achievement of more permanent results in language learning and in other areas of learning. When the young brain learns languages, it tends to develop an enhanced capacity to learn languages throughout life.

In relation to ELL, concern has sometimes been expressed that a child exposed to more than one language may become confused and mix them up, slowing down

¹³ Eurydice, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities*, 2009, <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/documents/098EN.pdf>.

¹⁴ R. Johnstone, *Addressing 'the age factor': Some implications for languages policy*, Council of Europe, 2002, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/JohnstoneEN.pdf>.

language development. However, under favourable circumstances, this is not the case¹⁵. Research suggests that education through the medium of a second/foreign language actually enhances communication awareness in the first language/mother tongue. Children who have access to more than one language tend to transfer into the first language/mother tongue the concepts and terms they have learned through the second/foreign language and vice versa. Hence, language processing in a multilingual mind helps stimulate cognitive competences.

Research evidence shows that a different cultural background, accompanied by bilingualism, tends to have a positive influence on a child's ability to learn a second/foreign language and paves the way to further language learning¹⁶. Socio-economic conditions, however, can also influence results, and a less well-off background seems to correlate with weaker performance in second/foreign language learning¹⁷.

5. PROVEN ORIENTATIONS FOR ELL

Within the 'ET2020' *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training*, strengthening linguistic skills is seen as a way to raise the level of basic skills, thus contributing to improving the quality and efficiency of education. The Barcelona objective of 'mother tongue plus two' is closely associated with this aspect, and a very early start contributes to making language skills sustainable in a lifelong learning perspective.

A supportive environment is essential to ensure that ELL is beneficial. Guidance and practical models are needed to foster quality ELL on a sustainable basis and to secure the engagement of all stakeholders. Practical experience as well as academic evidence suggest that ELL as part of general early childhood education and care should pursue the following goals:

- **support intercultural education:** raising awareness of language diversity supports intercultural awareness and helps to convey societal values such as openness to diversity and respect;
- **foster the personal development of the child:** multilingual activities aimed at systematically raising awareness of different languages contribute to the development of children's general competences and skills;

¹⁵ P. Edelenbos, R. Johnstone, A. Kubanek, *The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners*, European Commission, 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/young_en.pdf.

¹⁶ M. Nikolov, J. Mihaljevic Djigunovic, *Recent research on age, second language acquisition and early foreign language learning*, 2006, <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=530504>.

¹⁷ See for example R. Jariene and A. Razmantiene, 'The influence of pupils' socio-economic background on achievements in reading and writing skills', Preliminary paper for the Intergovernmental Conference 'Languages of Schooling: towards a Framework for Europe', Council of Europe, 2006, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Jariene_Razmantiene_EN.doc.

- consistency with a **lifelong learning perspective**: pursue equity of access, patch up the aims and the available resources and ensure continuity of approaches in the passage from pre-primary to primary;
- where appropriate, **introduction to the same second/foreign language** which will subsequently be learned in primary school as part of the formal curriculum.

If these aims are to be met it is important to create a supportive environment for ELL as outlined in this Handbook. It calls on all relevant stakeholders — families, responsible authorities, staff, education and training providers and civil society at large — to play their part.

Proven orientations for improving the policy context for ELL

1) The aims of any ELL policy for children in pre-primary education should be to foster intercultural and multilingual education focused on the development of the child's personal potential. Where appropriate, it could also be to provide an introduction to a particular language that will be taught later on in primary school.

6. EQUITY, QUALITY, CONSISTENCY AND CONTINUITY

The growing interest in ELL is partly linked to a stimulation of demand by parents who realise that with increasing globalisation the acquisition of languages other than their first language/mother tongue opens their children's minds and is an asset for their future social and working life. It is also partly a response on the part of mainstream education systems faced with the increasingly challenging task of integrating non-native speakers.

Reconciling general interest with a wide variety of situations and needs not only raises issues regarding the place of ELL in the broader education context and strategy, but creates challenges in terms of available opportunities and resources — both in quantitative and qualitative terms — and equitable access.

6.1. Equity

ELL activities exist almost everywhere in Europe. They have largely been demand driven at the local level, on the initiative of school heads or in response to calls from parents, who can influence education providers.

With some exceptions, language activities at pre-primary level are not formally structured. There are marked differences in staff competences. Moreover, resources and opportunities are unevenly distributed, both geographically and within different socio-demographic groups.

Where an early start in language learning is seen as a key to better opportunities in life but access remains limited, ELL has become entangled with equity issues: better education often means earlier access to good quality language tuition for the advantaged. In some cases language learning opportunities are not offered at all in public kindergartens although this does happen in privately-run settings. In others, demand exceeds the available

places. Even where opportunities are there, for some children access is more difficult — for example where parents are asked to contribute additional fees for language lessons.

Furthermore, ELL is only provided in a limited number of languages. Diversifying the offer of languages is a challenge linked to local demand, to utilitarian considerations and to the availability of adequate human and financial resources.

In some contexts it may also be important to focus on possible differences in attitude and performance between boys and girls during ELL activities.

6.2. Quality and consistency

Practical experience shows that every child will benefit from the best conditions possible for developing his/her individual potential, including the acquisition of multilingual awareness and language skills. Pre-primary language education aims to offer all children equal opportunities for a good start to the emotional, social and cognitive development resulting from language exposure, taking into account their needs and interests and preparing them for primary school. Pre-primary language education is usually not obligatory; some countries are still working on making it available to all children free of charge.

Pre-primary education tends to focus on the language of instruction. Here, in some cases, curricula do exist and established processes are applied. In most cases pre-primary settings do not have specific objectives for second/foreign language learning.

Nowadays, most countries are introducing second/foreign language teaching in primary or are lowering the age at which this education starts. This may later pave the way to second/foreign language exposure in pre-primary school settings.

Experience shows that young children acquire languages in an intuitive way (unconscious learning), for example through listening and creative exploration stimulated by curiosity. The younger children are exposed to different languages, the greater their ability to develop a feeling for the rhythm, the phonology and the intonation of the language. Their potential to grasp the language structure later is also greatly enhanced. However, as children grow, their ability to adjust and imitate may decrease. There is evidence that while children are slower to acquire a second/foreign language than adolescents or adults are, they do tend to achieve higher levels of proficiency in the long run. Also, the length (duration) of exposure to the language usually has a positive influence.

Such evidence shows that programmes for fostering multilingual and intercultural competences at pre-primary level should be designed according to context and resources. They should strike the appropriate balance between raising awareness of different languages and cultures and learning one particular language.

In this context, ‘teaching a language’ should not be done in any formal way, since the first objective is to help children realise that there are languages other than their own, raising their interest and curiosity in discovering similarities and differences between different languages and making them familiar with different sounds and intonations. Hence, it is important that children are not put under pressure and are always able to express themselves in the language they feel most comfortable with. There is also increasing recognition that children need to ‘learn how to learn’. Children should thus be encouraged to acquire independence and initiate the language ‘learning process’.

Wherever ELL takes place, pursuing quality standards and an effective use of resources are usually helpful. There are many different ways of achieving quality assurance: tailored education programmes; suitably qualified and motivated staff; specific support to schools, staff and families; and monitoring and evaluation. Education networks can also provide guidance and support in relation to quality, as can the involvement of stakeholders.

In some countries responsibilities for general education and language education in pre-primary and primary school may be split (e.g. local vs. central level; authorities in charge of early childhood care vs. those in charge of education). Practical evidence shows that in order to avoid confusion and lack of coordination, strengthening cooperation between the various authorities involved will generally be quite helpful.

There is a great deal of good practice in ELL in multilingual and border areas involving exchanges and joint initiatives between different communities. These areas are forerunners in introducing effective and innovative language learning processes and have considerable potential for further dissemination and development, which deserves to be exploited.

Good practice for criteria of quality and consistency

- [Learn the neighbours’ language](#) (*Germany*)
- [Language awareness in kindergarten](#) (*France*)
- [CLIL Collaborative project work at early ages](#) (*Spain*)
- [\(Very\) Early Language Learning with Bear, Photo books, Digital Technology and Parents](#) (*Poland*)
- [Drei Hände, Tri roke, Tre mani](#) (*Austria*)

6.3. Continuity

Any ambitions to achieve effective ELL will benefit when placed in the wider educational context. While many countries are undergoing general educational reforms, those that present a more structured approach to ELL are generally countries with several official languages. The growing recognition that language skills are important has not yet been translated into practice in pre-primary education in a systematic, organised way.

For several decades, Europe has witnessed an increase in the number of years during which teaching of at least one language in addition to the language of

instruction is compulsory at school, and a lowering of the age at which this provision begins. Between 1984 and 2007, around 10 countries lowered by at least three years the age at which pupils first had to be taught a different language. These changes were particularly marked between 2003 and 2007¹⁸. Alongside these changes in the secondary curriculum, there have been developments at primary level.

In some countries, early language education has been optional but practised in most schools for several decades. In these countries, legislation made pre-primary activities in more than one language compulsory. In addition, it introduced second/foreign language learning from the first year of primary education. Countries where second/foreign language education has traditionally started at a later stage in the school curriculum are those experiencing the greatest changes.

The needs of children of pre-primary age differ from those entering primary education, especially those who have not received pre-primary education. Empirical evidence shows that a link between pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education to ensure continuity of learning as children move through the school system is usually most helpful. Where education systems have provided all young learners with opportunities to learn more than one language and an early start is the norm, transfer to the higher level of education is smooth and the overwhelming majority of the population achieves useful levels of second/foreign language proficiency.

In many countries, the fact that languages are not formally integrated at pre-primary level means that continuity and successful transition are lacking. As a result the different stages of education often fail to integrate what children already know and are good at. Continuity from pre-primary to primary and beyond can be complicated, since in some countries an increasing number of children starting compulsory school have a knowledge of a second or even a third (foreign) language. Dealing with a whole class with many different levels of language knowledge can be a challenge, but starting second/foreign language teaching from a basic level in primary is not the solution. Teachers should diversify their language teaching or capitalise on children's prior knowledge rather than considering that everyone is at the same starting point.

Enabling school staff to learn how to ensure continuity in language programmes in such circumstances would allow them to build on the children's existing competencies and lead to increased effectiveness in language learning.

Finally, for reasons of organisation and efficiency, continuity is not always compatible with a wide offer of languages. Covering a variety of languages means diversifying and multiplying structures at the various levels of education, including language education for staff. The financial implications are potentially high.

¹⁸ Eurydice, *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*, 2008, http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/095EN.pdf.

Good practice for continuity

– [Swedish immersion for Finnish-speaking children \(Finland\)](#)

Proven orientations for the criteria of equity, quality, continuity and consistency

2) Align programmes involving ELL with the principles and provisions applicable to early childhood education and care, encouraging multilingual activities as part of the child’s social, emotional and cognitive development, focusing on children’s communication in everyday situations and intercultural skills through an integrated approach and moving away from a traditional ‘language teaching’ approach.

3) Foster equitable access to ELL by ensuring consistency between objectives, context, resources and outcomes.

4) Strike an appropriate balance between raising awareness of different languages and cultures and learning one particular language, in particular by encouraging the further development of bilingualism in countries which offer such a possibility.

5) Ensure quality and continuity in language programmes with a special focus on the link between pre-primary and primary school. Support research and modelling for reconciling curricula with the diverse language competencies of pupils starting compulsory schooling, in particular those with special needs.

6) Where responsibilities are split between authorities in charge of child care on the one hand and language education on the other, ensure proper coordination.

7. PEDAGOGICAL PROCESSES

This chapter addresses the issues of staff (early childhood carers and educators) working in a pre-primary school setting. Appropriate pedagogical processes are a key factor in ensuring quality, consistency and sustainability in ELL. Irrespective of the range of approaches, there is evidence that increasing demand for ELL is creating increasing requirements for skilled staff and appropriate pedagogical materials. The amount of time devoted to exposure to the second/foreign language is also an important variable.

7.1. Age-appropriate processes

For ELL to produce good results, it is essential that the child has acquired sufficient maturity to assimilate what is said and done (concept of *learning readiness*) and that the pedagogical processes correspond to the age range of the children. Potential provision for ELL should be integrated into early childhood pedagogy and should not be formalised or designed to ‘fast track’ youngsters out of their childhood experiences.

Although pre-primary school is increasingly influenced by primary school pedagogy, it remains qualitatively different. Based on the available evidence, ELL activities need to be conceived and structured according to the following specific criteria.

- ELL should not foster languages as a specific subject but rather as a communication tool to be used in other activities.
- ELL should be integrated into contexts in which the language is meaningful and useful, such as in everyday or playful situations, since play is the child's natural medium of learning in pre-primary. This could take the form of socio-dramatic/pretend play or bilingual story-telling and games. It should therefore be spontaneous and happen without constraints or effort on the part of the children.
- The role of ELL staff is to provide an enriching, engaging environment, a structure that supports and extends learning opportunities through a scaffolding process (helping children to learn, play and solve the challenges facing them with a simple hint, question, or prompt). ELL should allow them to monitor a child's learning progress and anticipate his/her potential development through formative assessment. This will identify and build upon each child's unique potential. There should not be any formal summative assessment of language competences involving grading.

7.2. Sound and measurable processes

A review of practice in Member States suggests that there is little evidence of agreed processes, uniformity of approach or established indicators of achievement in ELL. Rather there is evidence of considerable autonomy in pockets of existing activity. It is therefore important to develop a sound and consensual scientific basis for ELL theory and practice, backed by research and validation, especially when introducing innovation. The same goes for materials used in ELL.

In this context, further investigation and experimentation with regard to ELL processes, supported by peer evaluation and sharing of results and resources, will usually be most useful.

7.3. Existing models

ELL processes range from language awareness-raising or exposure to bilingual approaches through to full immersion programmes. The degree of focus and amount of exposure to the target language vary from use of the target language for some hours a week in specific contexts to use of it in all situations throughout the pre-primary school. The duration of the exposure also varies from short-term pilot projects to long-term established ELL programmes.

Working in pre-primary school settings through the target language can help children reach similar or at least comparable competencies in the first language/mother tongue and in the target language. In addition to the intercultural experience, early language learning can enhance the cognitive

development of the child, improve concentration capacity and foster flexible thinking.

In this way, the language is acquired spontaneously rather than learned. By linking language learning to experience in realistic settings, the integration of language and curriculum leads to *construction* learning as opposed to *instruction* learning.

7.3.1. *Language awareness-raising or exposure*

The main aim of language awareness-raising is to develop the perception and recognition of different sounds and concepts of one or more languages and the ability to understand and reproduce them in an interactive way. It is not meant to convey a knowledge of the structures or vocabulary of one or more languages.

Language exposure aims at preparing and helping children to learn a new language. Exposure differs in focus and duration according to the language and one language — the actual *language of instruction* — is dominant.

7.3.2. *CLIL*

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) refers to any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of nonlanguage content¹⁹.

CLIL is usually applied in primary and secondary education. However, applications do exist in pre-primary settings, where the approach is adapted to the age group and the curricula.

7.3.3. *Language tandems*

Bilingual exposure can involve tandems of staff using different languages. The children's everyday activities take place in two languages in the same classroom. The process is usually based on the 'one person-one language' principle. The tasks are divided *equally* to ensure that both staff members spend sufficient time with the children. It requires good coordination between two people in charge of the same group of children and an agreed approach on the relation between the language of instruction and the second/foreign language.

This model may involve one-way and two-way immersion. In one-way immersion, some of the teaching time is in the target language. In two-way immersion, two language groups learn each other's language by working for some of the pre-primary day in one language and for the rest of the day in the other.

¹⁹ See CLIL/EMILE *The European dimension Actions, Trends and Foresight Potential* (2002), http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/pdf/doc491_en.pdf.

Children should not be forced to use one of the two languages. However, even if they are allowed to use their first language/mother tongue when communicating with the staff, they are encouraged and prompted to start using the target language. In the initial period both staff members may have to be present because the children need a contact person who speaks the language with which they are more comfortable in problematic situations.

7.3.4. Monolingual exposure

Monolingual exposure involves immersion in an official or minority/regional language other than the child's first language/mother tongue. The language of instruction is in fact the target language.

Good practice in existing models

- [Let's play in English](#) (Awareness raising — *Italy*)
- [Brown bear](#) (Cooperative learning — *Cyprus*)
- [Multicultural teaching](#) (Language tandems — *Poland*)
- [Bilingual French-German early childhood education and culture](#) (Language tandems — *Germany*)
- [Early English in kindergarten and primary school](#) (Total Physical Response method — *the Netherlands*)
- [Early Language Learning in preschool](#) (Total Physical Response method — *Slovenia*)
- [Inglegoiz](#) (CLIL — *Spain*)
- [Children's heart](#) (CLIL — *Belgium, French Community*)
- [The scientific approach](#) (CLIL — *Belgium, French Community*)
- [Mathematics](#) (activity in the target language) (CLIL — *Belgium, French Community*)

7.4. Language materials

Materials can usefully support the pedagogical work of the staff. They may include:

- specific language-learning tools suitable for different contexts, including bi-or multilingual tools;
- other materials — not necessarily developed for language learning — that can be used for language mainstreaming;
- tools for monitoring the child's language-learning progress and anticipating his/her potential development.

ELL materials are ready-made or developed by teams of staff and language experts, tested in practice settings and further validated. Support for this process can be obtained through the EU Lifelong Learning Programme.

Pedagogical materials are not always widely available and disseminated. An effective way to raise awareness and increase access to such materials is to increase the number of ELL resource centres and libraries and/or create a central repository for such materials and resources.

Parents must be informed and offered access to these language materials. Agents such as publishers, television broadcasters and others involved in the media should be more involved in their dissemination.

Good practice for language materials

– [Methodology for very early language learning](#) (Czech Republic)

Proven orientations for pedagogical processes

7) ELL activities should be adapted to the age of the learners and to the pre-primary context. Children should be exposed to the target language in meaningful and, if possible, authentic settings, in such a way that the language is spontaneously acquired rather than consciously learnt. Pedagogical models should take into account the advantages of immersion.

8) ELL processes should be sound and measurable. While children should not be formally tested, investigation and experimentation should be encouraged to design, test and validate the outcome of these processes.

9) Pedagogical materials should be made widely available and disseminated by enhancing ELL resource centres and libraries and by exploiting online tools. Staff should be encouraged to develop such language tools.

8. APPROPRIATE SKILLS AND COMPETENCES FOR PRE-PRIMARY STAFF

The qualification profile of staff working with young children in pre-primary settings has long been recognised as a critical factor for the quality of both the pre-primary settings and children's experiences. This also holds true for those staff — regardless of their occupational role (child carers, language teachers) — who are supporting ELL activities at pre-primary level.

Staff education and training are crucial for achieving language-learning objectives within the general aims of early childhood education and care. Educational attainment of pre-primary staff varies considerably across Member States, with some countries requiring degree-level education, others stipulating vocational training and some with no qualification requirements at all. Greater interest in ELL is now creating new demand for qualified staff. This presents a particular challenge as the pool of available staff with sufficient language skills is often limited. Pre-primary settings outside the formal education system do seem more adaptable in meeting the demand for ELL, but they also face constraints as a result of the limited number of qualified professionals on the labour market. There is therefore a need to develop and deliver coherent staff education programmes to support the delivery of ELL that take account of the complex reality in each country.

In some cases ELL is practised by staff with good pedagogical skills but low language proficiency; in others it is practised by language teachers lacking an appropriate pedagogical background. In both cases, only a few may be aware of how young children's cognitive processes develop, particularly in the case of second/foreign language acquisition. Both pedagogical and language skills are essential if ELL is to be effective.

Whatever their qualifications, staff should have the general pedagogical skills required for working with children in pre-primary settings and they should be aware of the intercultural implications linked to language learning.

While it would be unrealistic to expect all staff involved to have academic training, experience shows that it is important to define minimal requirements. If the purpose is to raise awareness of language diversity and multilingualism, the people involved should have some knowledge of the target language(s). Those who are expected to provide 'exposure' to specific languages should understand how language acquisition works and be familiar with second/foreign language teaching skills. In addition, they should also be proficient in the target language(s).

8.1. Language skills

In order to benefit from ELL, children need to have a genuine, natural contact with the language(s) that matches their degree of psychological and cognitive development. They also need to use the language(s) in both an active and passive/receptive way.

There can be a considerable skills gap between staff in terms of their levels of competence in languages or language pedagogy. Although some governments encourage teacher education institutions to teach more than one language, the vast majority of pre-primary staff have no specific level of proficiency in the target language(s).

Staff should therefore have opportunities for in-service language training on a continuous basis to upgrade or maintain their language skills.

The first aim of language awareness-raising is to cultivate the perception and recognition of different sounds and concepts in one or more languages. Hence, although pre-primary staff are not necessarily required to be expert linguists, staff education programmes should ideally include language courses enabling them to reach at least level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in the language they are dealing with.

In cases of language exposure, staff should be sufficiently confident and fluent in the target language to talk spontaneously and correctly to the child, reproducing the pronunciation and intonation of native speakers to a reasonable degree. They should be able to use an age-appropriate level of communicative competence to serve as a model.

In particular cases, such as in ELL for children with a minority background, staff may be required to master the target language at mother tongue level, so that they can use it in any situation.

Good practice for language skills

– [Support for early language acquisition in pre-school education](#)
(Language consulting and training — Austria)

8.2. Pedagogical skills

Working with languages in pre-primary settings requires special skills over and above language knowledge. Staff need to be familiar with psychological (cognitive, affective and social), pedagogical and didactical processes suitable for young children.

Language teachers specialising in ELL need to understand the pedagogical principles involved.

They also need to understand the principles of child development, not just ‘language teaching’.

Ideally, staff should have a solid grounding in how second/foreign language acquisition works, particularly with respect to young children. This competence is essential for those who are working with children from a migrant background — and especially newcomers — since staff are often their first contact with the language of instruction. In this case, specific linguistic competences should go beyond intercultural awareness and diversity management.

Staff should also be trained to monitor the language-learning progress of the child and anticipate his/her potential development.

Good practice for pedagogical skills

– [LBK1, Lëtzebuerger monitoring concept for the 1st Cycle](#) (Monitoring concept for staff — Luxembourg)

8.3. Intercultural competences

The review of ELL practices in Member States suggests that a multilingual approach is also viewed as an intercultural approach. Language education should also involve intercultural education. Staff will therefore require some knowledge of the culture(s) related to the target language(s).

Greater cultural awareness and understanding can prevent teachers from developing unfavourable perceptions or low expectations with regard to certain groups of children, such as those with a minority or migrant background. This could otherwise have a negative impact on the children’s personal and social development as well as their future learning.

When considering the skilling of future staff in intercultural awareness, there is a need to be innovative. In some countries, for example, student teachers spend time living in areas where there are large and diverse community groups, to enhance their practical understanding of what it means to operate in an intercultural context.

8.4. Staff mobility

Experience has provided abundant evidence that cross-border exchanges not only improve language skills but can considerably boost overall staff competence, motivation and self-confidence.

Transnational staff mobility should be part of a broader cooperation project involving institutions and schools. Partnerships and mutual exchanges, supported by multilingual information tools, are key success factors in this process.

The Lifelong Learning Programme and the European Regional Development Fund, as well as Member State programmes, provide various opportunities for partnerships and mobility.

However, in a number of countries staff involved in language activities in pre-primary settings do not take advantage of these mobility opportunities, either because they are simply not informed or because they are not entitled. Family responsibilities and a general unwillingness on the part of pre-primary establishments to release staff may also be responsible for the low uptake of mobility opportunities.

The Comenius assistantship action, financed by the Lifelong Learning Programme, provides an opportunity for future teachers to raise awareness of their native language and culture in the host schools, regardless of whether it is part of the formal curriculum. This practice could be further encouraged as a means to highlight linguistic and cultural diversity.

8.5. Native speakers

Exposure to native speech can produce remarkable results, particularly in the development of aural and oral skills. Contact with native speakers brings direct experience of linguistic and cultural diversity. The involvement of native-speaking staff in fostering their first language/mother tongue as a foreign language should therefore be promoted.

There are a number of options available for involving native-speaking staff. They may, for example, be recruited by providing additional positions within the school structure, or they may be seconded teachers or assistants from abroad.

When native-speaking staff are involved, they should possess the right pedagogical and intercultural skills for ELL. Visiting staff from another country/culture in particular need to understand the specific nature of the learning environment of their host culture. To help them integrate host countries should offer training opportunities and adequate support.

Good practice for using native speakers

– [English Speaking Union Pilot Oracy Programme with Santa Klara College Kindergarten 2 Pupils \(Malta\)](#)

8.6. Staff education and training programmes

Programmes for the initial and in-service training of staff should be adapted to the objectives of the job and to the skills, knowledge and personal dispositions of the people targeted.

Education and training programmes should include modules such as language classes, early childhood pedagogy, methodology and didactics, as well as internships and career experience in a foreign country. Mobility in particular is an essential dimension in any education programme in which languages are involved. Funding and assistance with the development of ELL programmes should be offered to training institutions in order to provide sound and effective education and training programmes.

Traditional processes can be successfully complemented by alternative approaches such as mentoring, on-the-job coaching and peer learning. The general principles of adult learning and learner support should be applied to any initiative designed to upskill staff in ELL.

Furthermore, career guidance and support for professional development and education and training opportunities related to ELL are especially important for staff who may be less likely to avail themselves of such services.

The development of staff skills in ELL should be regarded as a long-term investment, so that the skills acquired remain relevant and consistent with the ELL objectives, with continuing emphasis on upskilling and making language awareness a priority. This long-term commitment will serve to retain the motivation of both staff and children and ensure the quality and efficiency of ELL.

Good practice for staff training

– [Odmalička \(Childhood\) — From an early age](#) (Staff training and peer evaluation — *Czech Republic*)

Proven orientations for appropriate skills and competences for pre-primary staff

10) Develop appropriate education and training programmes to ensure that staff trainers and staff involved in ELL — including native speakers — possess the following skills and competences:

- language abilities;

-early childhood pedagogy skills and language fostering as well as language monitoring skills

- intercultural competences for raising awareness of multilingualism and cultural diversity.

11) Promote opportunities for mobility and cooperation — in particular between neighbouring countries — offered by EU and national programmes, and the creation of multilingual information tools. Support measures should be

put in place to facilitate the integration of ELL staff on secondment from a foreign country.

9. CHILDREN WITH A MINORITY OR MIGRANT BACKGROUND

A number of European countries have more than one official language and there are in the EU around 60 minority or regional languages, as defined by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages²⁰. In bilingual or multilingual areas knowledge of different languages is an asset and often a requirement.

Language and culture are inextricably linked. Children with a minority or migrant background therefore tend to be more sensitive to a multilingual and intercultural environment and may be predisposed to language learning. However, multilingual activities can also be challenging for them. One of the primary concerns of parents and staff is the children's ability to master both their first language/mother tongue and the language of instruction. The children's needs must be addressed first and foremost and their background should always be taken into consideration in order to avoid any adverse effects of language learning.

The heterogeneity of minority and migrant groups calls for a diversified answer to issues linked to language learning, in relation to both first language/mother tongue and second/foreign language. Accommodating an increasing diversity of first languages/mother tongues, as a result of migration flows, presents opportunities and challenges but also enriches the diversity of the communities involved.

Children with a minority or migrant background for whom the language of instruction is not the first language/mother tongue may be insufficiently integrated into mainstream schooling and their progress through school may be impeded by their low level of competency in the language of instruction. Studies also show that children with a migrant background tend to participate less in pre-primary education compared to other children. The successful integration of such children can be challenging and resource intensive in the initial stages, although the quality of learners' performances often seems to be linked to their socio-economic rather than their ethnic or cultural background. The participation of these children in programmes that provide systematic language support in the language of instruction at pre-primary level should therefore be encouraged, since it would be beneficial for their social integration²¹ and educational journey.

It is therefore essential to implement intercultural education strategies which include diversity policies in order to deliver an inclusive approach to learning. Ultimately, the ability to communicate across all cultures represented in society is necessary for citizens who wish to succeed in all aspects of life, whether as children or as adults, and it is advisable to start acquiring these communication skills early.

²⁰ Council of Europe, *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, 1992, <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/148.htm>.

²¹ Eurydice, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities*, 2009, <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/documents/098EN.pdf>.

9.1. In the pre-primary setting

Like language and culture, diversity is a cross-cutting issue and its many challenges and possibilities are visible in a variety of pre-primary settings.

Pre-primary staff may have to deal with children from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, different ethnicities and languages, as well as diverse religious or cultural backgrounds. However, diversity issues do not seem to be sufficiently integrated into staff training programmes or pre-primary curricula. Diversity training needs to target both staff and children. Staff should be prepared to grasp the opportunities and meet the challenges such diversity presents through greater cultural understanding and a greater ability to communicate effectively across boundaries. This can mitigate any negative impact on children's experience in the pre-primary setting. Specific measures are also necessary, and increasingly taken, to foster all children's understanding of the language of instruction while respecting the identity, culture and first language(s)/mother tongue(s) of the individual.

Children with a minority or migrant background will usually benefit when offered equal opportunities to access language learning and support to maintain and improve both their first language/mother tongue and the second language. Their established repertoire should therefore be further valued and promoted.

Raising awareness of a minority/regional language in pre-primary aims to promote mastery of the first language/mother tongue and functional skills in the second language. This is a valuable preparation for bilingual schooling. In some cases the language knowledge of the staff can be an issue, since only those pre-primary staff who can speak the minority/regional language very well can use the language across a range of everyday activities in a pre-primary setting. Staff need further training and regular practice. When the minority/regional language is not commonly practised, children tend to communicate in the language which is easier for them, i.e. not necessarily the minority/regional language. It is important that appropriate methods — such as play-based interaction — are applied to increase the motivation of both staff and children to use the minority/regional language.

Language awareness-raising with children from a migrant background is an opportunity to value and capitalise on the diversity they bring to the pre-primary setting, to enhance multilingual and intercultural awareness and outlook on life through daily contact, and to explore aspects of the cultures of origin. In the longer term, people who are able to communicate effectively across cultural barriers will be better equipped for a globalised world.

Good practice for ELL with children with a minority or migrant background in the pre-primary setting

- [Intercultural awareness focusing on migrant languages and acquisition of the language of instruction](#) (Austria)
- [Nursery school, Tallinn](#) (Estonia)
- [The experience of the Finnish-Russian day care centre 'Kalinka'](#) (Finland)

9.2. Out of the pre-primary setting

Language acquisition in young children is influenced by all the environments that they experience. However, what happens in the home environment is as important, if not more important, than activity which takes place outside the home, in a pre-primary setting for example. The role and engagement of parents are critical in supporting young children learning the first language/mother tongue and the language of instruction in school. However, parents with migrant backgrounds are often themselves struggling with the difficulty of communicating in the language(s) of the host country, in particular with the school. There is therefore a need to improve communication processes between families and the school. Starting these processes in pre-primary settings, where parents are often more comfortable and relaxed with staff, is of great benefit.

Language learning is a lifelong experience and families and other sources of support need to be engaged as early as possible. Parents could, for example, be involved in various school events and have the opportunity to observe their child's class. This could enable them to support multilingual and intercultural awareness, as their children will be learning alongside children for whom the language of instruction is also the first language/mother tongue.

In certain cultural environments parents — in particular mothers — may be reluctant to engage with their children in activities involving language awareness-raising with the community. In most countries, however, additional help is available and solutions which have been developed for one cultural group can also be applied to another.

Parents who are bilingual may prefer to speak only one language — usually the language of instruction — to their children. Other parents start off by speaking their first language/mother tongue to their children but give up when their children enter a period of resistance and refuse to speak anything but the language of instruction in school. Hence, multilingual families often find it difficult to choose in which language(s) to raise their children and need consistent advice.

Community-based groups and schools can be valuable as they enable families to discuss their concerns related to multilingualism, to exchange experience and to obtain practical guidance.

In some countries, combined support for learning the language of the host country is offered to both children and parents together (particularly mothers). This can produce effective results, not only in terms of language learning but also in terms of the family's social integration within the host country environment.

There is a broad range of language awareness-raising going on across Member States with some ethnic organisations offering pre-primary heritage language initiation to complement the teaching provided through the formal system. Staff education must equip the individuals concerned with the means to tap into this wealth and capitalise on the diversity as a positive rather than a purely challenging component of the learning environment. Experience shows that it is possible to stimulate interest for the language of the host country and respect for the heritage language at the same

time in a multidisciplinary context, for example in childcare centres. This approach is well received by the target groups and is effective, but takes time.

Good practice for ELL with children from a minority or migrant background out of the pre-primary setting

- [Supporting multilingual families in the community](#) (United Kingdom (England))

Proven orientations for ELL with children from a minority or migrant background

12) Promote initiatives that help immigrant families gain a real appreciation of the importance of learning the language of instruction in the education system of the host country as early as possible at school, and of their role in this process.

13) Link language learning to the promotion of intercultural awareness for both pupils and staff:

- encourage engagement with civil society, migrant groups (such as diaspora groups), and community and religious leaders in order to establish networks for ongoing dialogue and ensure cultural understanding, in particular through intercultural advisers;
- attract and engage staff who are second-generation immigrants into the pre-primary education workforce to make it more representative of the community it serves and build bridges between the different cultures;
- encourage and motivate children from a minority or migrant background to integrate their language knowledge and intercultural experiences into the school's daily activities.

14) In the case of pupils from a minority background, when the environment is less conducive to the target language, whether it be the first language/mother tongue or the second language, and children are reluctant to use the minority/regional language, stimulate interest through appropriate motivation methods, particularly play-based interaction.

10. STAKEHOLDERS

It is important to engage parents, communities, non governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders to provide a support network for what goes on within and outside pre-primary settings. They can provide support for the learning of both the first language/mother tongue and the second/foreign language. Parents and members of the wider community can support ELL staff. Older children such as secondary school pupils can be involved in ELL by participating in activities with their younger peers. Children taking part in ELL can also support each other mutually, in particular when children with a minority and migrant background are involved.

Native-speaker stakeholders in the target language can be particularly useful in supporting ELL. They should be encouraged to participate in mobility opportunities and cross-border exchanges.

10.1. Parents

Pre-primary learning is about shared responsibility. Parents are the most important stakeholders in ensuring success with early language learning. Parents have a strong voice when it comes to influencing decision makers, both on the provision of ELL and on the choice of the target language. Where parental demand falls off, possibly for economic reasons, the number of pre-primary establishments offering foreign language learning can decrease.

Parents' engagement is central to the success of language learning at all stages of a child's development, whether this takes place in the home or at school, for both staff and pupils alike. Parents can even support their children's efforts and draw direct personal benefits by learning a second/foreign language with them. Parents who are native speakers of the target language can play an effective role in enhancing ELL activities. Their involvement in those activities may also deepen their understanding and awareness of different cultures and languages, as their children tend to have more positive attitudes towards these differences.

Good practice for the role of parents in supporting ELL

- [Sensitising to German](#) (Poland)
- [Goldilocks and the three bears](#) (Cyprus & Italy)

10.2. Civil society

The local learning environment where pre-primary education is delivered is subject to a range of local, regional, national, social, cultural, political and economic influences. Underestimating or misunderstanding them can distort the learning objectives and weaken the learning outcomes.

Particularly where significant numbers of children belong to minority or migrant backgrounds, much support for the ELL process can be gained by developing effective engagement with the community and other grassroots stakeholders, who may also bring the all-important parental support with them. Moreover, such engagement can support the effective dissemination of information, facilitate cross-cultural understanding and secure cooperation with the community.

Engagement with community groups is not only important for migrants and minorities. Pre-primary settings form part of a local community and do not operate in a vacuum. The engagement of a wide range of adults (not only parents) can significantly enrich children's learning experiences. Other stakeholders who can offer key support for ELL include retired people who are prepared to come into the class and read or tell a story. This does not exclude the role of the language specialist, but the key is to ensure that all people involved understand their function in supporting and extending ELL and how children learn at this young age.

Where schools and kindergartens have a certain degree of autonomy, they may engage freely with individuals and civil society organisations. In other cases, the role of civil society stakeholders will have to be defined in agreement with the responsible authorities.

Whilst acknowledging the potential support of the broad membership of civil society in the development of language learning in pre-primary settings, it is important to ensure compliance with regulations and good practice guidelines in relation to child protection (e.g. police vetting of adult staff and volunteers).

Good practice for the role of all stakeholders in supporting ELL

– [Promotion of language skills in the local language](#) (Switzerland)

Proven orientations for the role of stakeholders in supporting ELL

15) Parents should be made aware that:

- early language learning as part of pre-school activities can foster a child’s cognitive development and support further language learning, provided that appropriate conditions are met;
- the choice of a second/foreign language for the development of young children can be determined by its benefits in terms of enrichment, respect and understanding rather than utilitarian considerations;
- pressure brought to bear on children as a result of overformalised early language learning can be counterproductive.

16) Pre-primary settings should be encouraged to identify, directly or through the competent authorities, civil society members (individuals or associations) that can make a relevant, constructive and inspiring contribution to ELL practice, and to actively involve them in supporting and promoting ELL practice.

17) Encourage cooperation between statutory, community, voluntary and private organisations and institutions for the development and dissemination of good examples of information and resources in support of ELL.

11. MAPPING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Early language learning priorities vary, not only between countries but also within countries. Adding the languages of migrant communities creates a complex, multilayered challenge. Local knowledge is therefore an essential prerequisite for any initiative that attempts to offer advice or examples of good practice. Although there is considerable *ad hoc* ELL activity in the EU, the available information is sporadic and much of it has not been systematically stored or monitored. Where ELL

is not offered in the formal system, it often takes place in non-formal contexts. However, the available data mostly refer to the formal education system²².

As demand for ELL continues to increase and languages move higher up the political agenda, there is a need for comprehensive, sound quantitative and qualitative data to assess the current situation and support institutional, pedagogical and pre-school management choices for the future. A large amount of knowledge could be made available by encouraging dissemination and peer-learning activities and reviews.

Reliable baseline data are also essential for the consistent measuring of policy outcomes and impacts and for effective planning for the future. Member States could benefit from a comparison of their ELL policies based on similar self-analysis templates and from advice on mapping and encouraging pre-service and in-service training.

Proven orientations for improving the knowledge base

18) Support and encourage appropriate research, surveys and studies to obtain a comprehensive and comparable overview of the size and quality of ELL activities in all areas and encourage mapping of staff training.

²² Eurydice, *Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe*, 2008, http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/095EN.pdf.

MANDATE OF THE THEMATIC GROUP ON EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Education and Culture

Culture, Multilingualism and Communication

Multilingualism policy

Brussels,
EAC.C.5 /FPe D(2009)

OPEN METHOD OF COORDINATION

THEMATIC GROUP ON EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING

DRAFT MANDATE 2009-2011

- The group’s work shall focus on the Early Language Learning aspects of Strategic Objective 2 of the New Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (‘ECET 2020’): ‘Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, with a view to enabling citizens to communicate in two foreign languages from an early age and to enable migrants to learn the language of the host country.’
- Its main objective will be to establish policy recommendations on Early Language Learning, to be submitted to a high-level seminar of Member State representatives on the Barcelona language learning targets, planned in early 2011 as a part of the general review of the multilingualism policy scheduled in 2011/2012.
- The group shall carry out the following assignments in relation to Early Language Learning:
 - define the concepts of Early Language Learning within the scope of the present mandate;
 - collect and exchange information on relevant policy developments and challenges in the participating countries and at European level;
 - collect, analyse and discuss examples of good practice and operational challenges;
 - identify priority areas for action and coordination at national and EU level;
 - draft appropriate strategic and operational recommendations.
- The group shall set its work programme and working methods, which may include peer learning activities such as analyses, surveys, studies, reports, compendia, study visits, consultations and events.

- *The group will be chaired by the Commission.*
- *The Commission will provide the group's secretariat.*
- The group will be established for a period of three years (2009-2011). It shall complete its assignment by the 31st March 2011.
