

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 49

The role of language in the mobilisation of Ethnic and Immigrant minorities

This is an Interim Briefing Paper of the project that started in September 2001

Context of the Research

Language is often at the centre of the political mobilization of minorities within a majority group. It is a political issue and a cultural resort for minorities - playing a decisive role in the social integration of ethnic fringe groups and immigrants. However, these languages are hardly protected in any way.

This project is examining language policies through comparative studies of ethnic minorities in Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain and Spain. The minorities involved are: the Frisians and the Turks in Germany, the Corsicans and the Tunisians in France, the Welsh and the Urdu speaking in Great Britain, the Sud-Tyroleans and the Chinese in Italy, the Catalans and the Moroccans in Spain.

Language policies are embedded in the social and political environment. Therefore, the project is dealing with the institutional framework conditions of language policies and the political discussions within the groups concerned. The main emphasis is on future minority language policies in the European Union with the aim of seeing intervention is needed outside the sphere of just language preservation, training and development.

Initial Conclusions

1. Language developments in the process of the formation of nation-states have been widely discussed at intellectual and at political levels. However, the issue of language of mobile ethnic minorities has not been developed.
2. The way a language is defined or self defined as being a minority language, influences linguistic policies at the institutional level and in the community.
3. Understanding of what are majority and minority languages is dependent upon power relationships at cultural, social, economic and political levels.
4. Language is important for building and maintaining communities with both immigrant and territorial or national minority groups.
5. The legal protection of minority languages in the different national contexts is a recent phenomenon and has been influenced by international conventions and the European Union policies. Although there are differences in the various forms of protection, nation-state building is the main reason.

6. As well as territorially based minority languages, immigrant minority languages are transnationally dispersed.
7. Minority languages that are at risk of disappearing, as they are decreasingly being spoken and written - need a different approach from minority languages that are spoken world wide and are majority languages in other countries.
8. The issue of language and how it relates to the State and nationality is becoming a higher priority. A single language nation is likely to be exception in future Europe.

Initial Recommendations

1. In spite of the differences in nation building, a comparison between the legislation protecting minority languages in the different European countries is needed in order to establish common European standards and good practices.
2. Identification between State, nationality and language should be considered in the historical perspective and in a critical way that allows the development of multilingual and multicultural societies in the perspective of stronger European integration.
3. A new approach to multilingualism should be promoted in all European schools.

Further Information

The full title of the project is: "The role of language mobilisation processes of ethnic and immigrant minorities". The Final Report is due in November 2004.

The project's web site is at: - http://www.emz-berlin.de/projekte_E/pj27_1E.htm

Key Publications

"Regional and Immigrant Minorities and the Development of National Languages in Europe". Due to be published in 2004

Research Institutions

University of Florence, Italy

Berliner Institut fuer Vergleichende Sozialforschung, Berlin, Germany

IUFM, Institut Universitaire de formation des maitres, Toulouse, France

University of London, Institute of Education, United Kingdom

Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain

Contact Persons

Giovanna Campani
University of Florence
Departement of Education
Via del Parione 11B
50125 Florence,
Italy

Tel: +39 055280562

Fax: +39 0552382098

Email: campani@unifi.it

For more information about other Briefing Papers on “New Perspectives for Learning” go to <http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/index.htm> or contact pjb Associates pjb@pjb.co.uk
Tel +44 1353 667973