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■ THE CHANGING FACE OF EUROPE: FACING THE CHANGE IN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

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The following interview with Professor Michael Kelly from Southampton University took place in July this year during his working visit to the University of Belgrade in connection with the Tempus Project "Reforming Foreign Language Studies in Serbia" (REFLESS). Apart from being a specialist in modern French culture and society, Professor Kelly also plays an important role in developing public policy on languages and cultural diversity in the UK and internationally. He has completed a substantial project for the European Commission to develop a Profile for language teacher training across Europe, which EU member states have been invited to use in appraising their programmes for training language teachers. He is Secretary of the European Language Council and Editor of the European Journal of Language Policy, as well as Director of the UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies with a remit to support these subjects in higher education across the UK.

In this interview Professor Kelly shares his views on the importance of languages in Europe, the changes that affect our policies for language education and the priorities in the development of quality language teacher education in the 21st century.

Ana Vlaisavljević (AV): The overall objective of the REFLESS Tempus Project in which you are involved is to ensure that Serbia is in a position to have formally educated and highly skilled linguistic mediators and professionals necessary for the integration of Serbia in Europe. How do you view the role of languages in the construction of European unity?

Professor Michael Kelly (MK): The European motto is unity and diversity. The fact that we are diverse, that we have a lot of different languages, is one of the fundamentals of Europe. However, having a lot of different languages is also the curse of Babel in that

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we can't simply understand each other. Therefore, we have to combine recognition of diversity of languages with the ability to understand one another. That is where languages are both an opportunity and a problem – a problem on a practical level, but an opportunity on a political level. Recognising language diversity enables the EU and Europe more generally to be more inclusive of a wider range of countries including Serbia, but potentially going even further afield. Without that commitment joining the European family would not be attractive for so many countries. Obviously, languages are important in a lot of more detailed ways – for economic activity, political activity, social cohesion and cultural development – but each of those is a topic in its own right.

AV: In the light of the growing global dominance of the English language, what do you think about the attempts to promote linguistic diversity in Europe, exemplified by the EU Council decision to endorse the policy of citizens learning two languages in addition to their mother tongue?

MK: Being a native English speaker, I am particularly aware of this question. I think the EU policy of two languages in addition to mother tongue is still a valuable aspiration, but it needs to be presented in a more nuanced way. If it really means learning two official European languages in addition to mother tongue, then I don't think that's going to work. The Committee of Intellectuals which was chaired by Amin Maalouf suggested that Europeans should obviously be literate in their mother tongue and be able to communicate in a language of international communication as the first foreign language, but that they should also choose what they call a "personal adoptive language", that is to say, a language which you enjoy learning, which perhaps means something to you personally or to your family. It doesn't matter what language that is, because all languages are valuable. I think that has certainly been part of the more recent thinking, although it is not easy to see how that would translate into education policy. Nevertheless, I think that a key issue which Europe is starting to identify is that languages are not just about language education, because people speak a lot of languages which they didn't acquire through the education system, but through their family, travel, or through personal independent learning. So, within the context of Maalouf's recommendations, I think there is a general recognition that for a majority of Europeans the first language of international communication is likely to be English. There are certainly parts of the world where other languages work as a tool of international communication and that would include Latin America where Spanish really is a necessary language, or Arabic right around Mediterranean. So, although English has a dominant role within Europe, it is not world domination and it is not permanent. Of course, there is a positive side to the role of English in that it enables everybody who speaks it to communicate with each other. It can be viewed as a gateway to learning about other people's cultures and their languages and can thus be used in a way that promotes multilingualism. In the non-English speaking countries of Europe the education system largely teaches English as the first foreign language and I think increasingly English does not appear as a foreign language within culture, but is coming to be regarded as similar to a driving test. You take the driving test and you can drive a car; you learn English and you can travel around the world.

AV: Teacher education plays a pivotal role in improving the quality of language teaching and learning, which is one of the key objectives of the Commission's Action

Plan for language learning and linguistic diversity. What are the priorities in the development of quality teacher education and training in the 21st century?

MK: If you assume that the state education system is an important part of language learning, then having teacher education as effective as possible is obviously a strategic requirement. The difficulty from the European perspective is that education is the responsibility of every single member state and every member state has a different approach to its education system. In a lot of countries education is seen as a national treasure and people value the particular way in which their country carries it out, so it is not something which is going to be standardised in the foreseeable future. The challenge in Europe, therefore, is to find ways of sharing experiences and aspirations and introducing change in a way that is compatible with each member state's culture and social system. There are certainly benefits in what you might call the "open convergence approach" and it would be a mistake for the European institutions to tell Britain or Serbia or France how they have to run their education. That would cause a lot of resistance, whereas if we use the more consultative approach, it becomes an issue of collective problem solving where we share similar aspirations, but we have different routes for achieving them.

AV: Some of the European Commission's projects such as the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education* which you and your colleagues completed in 2004 seek to identify the core pedagogical and linguistic skills necessary for today's language teachers. What were the greatest challenges in setting these common principles and objectives in language teacher education across Europe?

MK: *The European Profile for Language Teacher Education* is very much about not telling people what they've got to do, but what they need to think about, it is about articulating a set of shared concepts. Take the practical experience of working in a school for example. I think there is an agreement across the language educators that it is important that people in initial teacher education should have experience of working in schools as part of their formation, but every country approaches that in a different way. In some countries students spend two weeks observing in a school, whereas in other countries they may spend six months teaching classes at school. I believe that a combination of practical and theoretical education is the answer because in some countries where teacher education is mainly practical, it may well be that they don't give sufficient attention to the theoretical aspects of education. So, the Profile tries to introduce a range of forty areas, including practical experience. The main focus is initial teacher education, but we're increasingly realising that continuing professional education is probably more significant for language teachers than initial teacher education. From the point of view of Europe, if you think of how many teachers are just being trained to be teachers, and how many teachers are already there practicing, it is very important that new ideas, new approaches should also be available to the existing teachers who finished their initial training and need to develop further. Certainly the worst thing that can happen to a teacher is to stagnate – you finish your training and you do all your teaching in exactly the same way as when you started at the beginning of your career. Now, some countries have quite a strong regime of continuing professional development and it is obligatory. In some countries there are salary implications if you don't do the in-service training, whereas in other countries, it is very difficult to introduce any such practices.

AV: What is the situation like in the UK?

MK: I would say we are around above the middle of European practices, that is to say that continuing development is not obligatory, but there are strong incentives and a number of government-funded programmes for supplying teacher education. In the last few years I've been involved in running one of these programmes called *Links into Languages* which identified ten different areas in which it was important to develop existing teachers and we ran a nation-wide programme of courses in every locality of England. Now that has come to an end and the current government has transferred the funding from central programmes into the schools. They can now buy the training they require and there are quite a lot of different associations and organisations which provide training. So there is a lot of continuing professional development and the best teachers make good use of it, but there are also teachers who fall through the net. I think the advantage of involving teachers in professional development is that the good teachers are then able to pass on the things they've learnt and are able to give to other teachers the kinds of skills and knowledge which they developed in their career. Of course, in the UK it is a very devolved system. A lot of responsibility lies with the school, so the government doesn't have a lot of power to determine how teaching is done and I think that's a good thing. On the other hand, in some other European countries there is a central state requirement and every teacher has to comply with attending courses on a specified area and if they don't do it, they incur penalties of one sort or another.

AV: You've mentioned that the Profile lists some forty key elements in language teacher education. Which guidelines in your opinion present the greatest challenge for implementation in the European context?

MK: In the Profile we identified four broad areas. The first one was structure: how should teacher education be organised, what level it should be at, how long should the courses be, etc. We've made a number of recommendations along the line that I described earlier – say, people should think about how to include both practical and theoretical elements in teacher training. We have made other recommendations. For example, people should think about mentoring, which is common in some countries, but not common in others. Also, not every language has a translation for the word “mentor”. A mentor in some countries is an experienced teacher who takes responsibility for advising a new teacher and this can continue for a number of years, so it's a critical friend at a more senior level. But the mentor doesn't have power over the mentee. They simply have an advisory, supportive function, so it is not the same as the head of department. It is a more egalitarian approach to personal development, so we've recommended that every country should think about the idea of mentoring and should see where it would fit the teacher education in their national context. Another area is mobility...

AV: A small-scale survey I conducted in 2009/2010 among British and Serbian student teachers showed that while 75% of the British PGCE² trainees had spent at least a year in the target culture, 66.7% of Serbian respondents had never set foot in the target community. What can be done to overcome these practical constraints such as the lack of funding?

MK: We think it is very valuable for teachers to be able to spend a period of time in a country where their language is spoken as a native language, but again, there is a huge amount of difference between European countries. In some of them all of education has traditionally taken place within the national borders and in other countries there have been obligations on students or trainee teachers to spend a period of residence abroad. There is no simple magic wand to create a uniform system, but what we did suggest is that every country should think about how to promote greater mobility and exchange between the country where teaching is happening and a country where the language is spoken. Obviously, it doesn't necessarily have to be physical movement. It can be virtual communication and there are a lot of support mechanisms for virtual mobility: exchanges, e-mentoring, tandem learning, skypeing and video conferencing, and so on. So, lots of opportunities for making contacts without actually physically moving. And again, we've not said "you must do this particular thing"; what we've said is that you need to think about how in your country you can give teachers access to the countries where the language is spoken. So, if you'd like, encouraging and supporting, rather than trying to compel anyone to do what they find disagreeable.

AV: What about the remaining three areas in the Profile?

MK: The other three areas that we've looked at are: knowledge and understanding (what teachers should know), then skills and strategies (what practical tools, what approaches they should be able to employ), and then finally values. "Values" was in a sense the most difficult to do because in many countries it is assumed that teaching is in some way neutral, value-free. We hesitated over the issue of values, but we thought that a European Profile should, nonetheless, embody some European values. For example, diversity is an important one, so we are inviting European countries to think about how they can incorporate respect for diversity, interest in diversity into their programmes. Increasingly, teachers are confronted with classes of children who come from a lot of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. I know that it is beginning to happen in Serbia, but in some parts of Europe 100% of the class are non-native speakers of the local language and may come from a dozen different countries. The important thing is to know how to manage that situation while valuing diversity so, one thing we are saying is that, if you've got a diverse student group, you shouldn't try to eliminate the diversity. If you like, it's part of the European vision. The importance of learning would be another value which may seem obvious, but we risk saying that it's not an obligation which people should be forced to do, but a value which they should be encouraged to internalise. This idea of life-long learning is particularly important in the countries where teachers can simply not participate in development activities and in those countries we should encourage teachers to feel that they need to develop themselves and to continue learning through their life. The Profile is, therefore, not value-free, and it makes explicit the values which it wishes to embody.

AV: Finally, what are the expectations in terms of dissemination and application of the ideas and recommendations from the Profile across Europe?

MK: What people do with the Profile is very much down to each individual country or, indeed, each individual institution. Of course, not all teacher training is done by universities. It is done by lots of different institutions, but we feel that they should all learn from that Portfolio or at least think about the issues that it includes. There has

been no funding to implement the Profile, but individual countries and organisations have taken it as a useful thing to think about. For example, initially it was released in French, German and English, but very quickly Romania decided that they would like to disseminate it there, so one of the school inspectors translated the Profile into Romanian. Of course, nobody had asked them to do that, it was their choice. I know that in a lot of countries it is used in the English version without being translated into the local language. There are also parts of translations in a number of languages, but the success of the Profile will depend on how useful people find it. It has also been included in the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages commissioned by the Council of Europe. It requires the trainees during their course to think about the issues which have been set out in the Profile and to identify the ways in which they have developed expertise and ideas or acquired tools enabling them to address those issues. So, I would say on the whole that it is a slow burn, in the sense that it has not been driven by large amounts of funding, but the idea is that it is viral, that people who find it useful will use it.