EDUCATION
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PLURILINGUALISM FOR EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITY SPACES

By PLURI Project · Published October 2026

KEY QUESTION

How can institutions develop more sustainable approaches to multilingualism, while involving people in decision making?

CORE IDEA

Adopting process-based artistic and pedagogical practices can provide new approaches to engaging with multilingualism, strengthens expression, agency and participation in various learning and community settings.

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ENDANGERED LANGUAGES ARCHIVE
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INTRODUCTION

What is this document?

The European Union has long promoted language learning, investing significant resources in its development. The Council of Europe has developed the concept of plurilingual education, and its Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has helped to standardise language education across Europe and is also recognised beyond it.

Despite these notable achievements, there is a disconnect between an idealised vision of multilingualism and everyday practices. While everyone has some understanding of how language works, this knowledge often rests on misconceptions. For example, people often believe that multilingualism is the sum of separate, complete languages, or that language mixing and partial competence are signs of deficiency. Such assumptions shape how institutions respond to the linguistic repertoires of the people they work with.

This document provides practice-oriented policy recommendations for professionals involved in shaping learning, participation and public communication in educational, cultural and community settings.

The recommendations can help institutions to develop their own approaches, based on lessons learned from the PLURI Language Station. The PLURI Language Station is a customisable, modular toolkit designed to support plurilingual linguistic practices and challenge linguistic norms in various settings. It can be used to prepare small activities, revisit existing programmes and lesson plans, and address institutional routines. As a tool, the PLURI Language Station aligns with the Council of Europe's approach to plurilingualism, which promotes everyday languaging practices and partial competence (see CEFR Companion Volume, 2020).

The recommendations are based on qualitative insights collected during workshops, interviews and discussions with participants from linguistic minorities, educators, artists, activists, language practitioners and researchers. They also draw on the

development and testing of the PLURI Language Station practices with adults, children, and young people in both formal and non-formal settings.

This document sets out four recommendations for institutions to foster a language-aware environment. Relevant settings include but are not limited to school lessons, public library events, museum mediation programmes, community workshops or street-based activities. We focus on directions and decision points, rather than ready-made solutions, since an activity in one context may need adaptations to be suitable for another context.

Each recommendation includes an example from PLURI practice, demonstrating observations that influenced it. The recommendations can also be applied without the PLURI Language Station.

ABOUT

The PLURI Project

PLURI (Plurilingualism for Better Education, Cohesion and Linguistic Diversity) is a two-year European project funded by the European Union.

It is a collaboration between the University of Eastern Finland and Koopkultur e.V., with support from JoMoni Ry in Joensuu, Finland and the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) in Berlin, Germany.

The project explores multilingualism through participatory and process-based practices. It brings together perspectives from research, art, education and language practice, including plurilingual, anti-discriminatory and decolonial approaches. The project combines professional exchange with practical testing and adaptation of formats for adults, children and young people.

The PLURI project works towards safer spaces in which everyone can rely on their strongest linguistic resources when needed, knowing that no space is safe for everyone in the same way. To be successful, such an environment requires active participation. The PLURI Language Station enables different communities to play an active role in exploring, questioning and reshaping the language norms that determine whose voices are heard and valued.

CONTEXT

It’s not just a language

Human language is a structured set of symbols that follows specific rules and conveys meaning. Named languages are useful for communication, teaching, policy and rights. However, they do not provide a complete description of how people use language. Our approach draws on research that defines language as an activity. ‘Languaging’ is the act of creating meaning, shaping experience, and interacting with the environment, rather than trying to fit into a fixed system. Everyday communication can involve different varieties of language, including scripts, symbols, sounds and images. People may understand more than they can express, recognise a text without being able to read it fluently, or sense meaning through association, gestures, or collaborative interpretation.

What defines a language, a dialect, correct usage or sufficient competence is also shaped by history, institutions and social power. Institutional decisions about language can influence access, participation, recognition and belonging. Therefore, the practical question is not only which languages are present, but also which forms of expression are recognised, corrected, displayed, translated, ignored or given authority. This question appears differently across formal and non-formal educational and community settings.

A useful starting point is to examine the values and assumptions behind institutional language policies and practices, considering how these affect different people. The following questions and perspectives can guide this reflection:

1 How do we approach multilingualism?

Deficiency

As a deficiency that focuses on weak or missing skills in the official language, creating a problem that must be fixed before full participation is possible.

Tokenism

As tokenism or a symbolic gesture that makes linguistic repertoires visible, but without making space to activate them. Languages are treated hierarchically: the dominant language is the priority, and other languaging practices have symbolic but no practical value.

Resource

As a resource when people use their full linguistic and multimodal repertoires for communication, active learning and participation. This approach is the cornerstone of translanguaging.

2 Which language varieties, symbols and other forms of expression are recognised, and which are absent or restricted?

3 Who decides what becomes visible, how it is translated, and what counts as correct or appropriate?

4 Can different linguistic practices coexist, overlap and be negotiated, or must they remain separate?

TOOLKIT

PLURI Language Station

The PLURI Language Station is a mobile, modular 'laboratory' that explores multilingualism through artistic practice and research, and is designed to be used in different formal, non-formal, and community settings.

It helps transform critiques of monolingual routines into practices that temporarily disrupt the 'normal' functioning of language. It therefore does not merely 'add more languages', but deliberately creates situations in which norms (including correctness, visibility, and legitimacy) can be experienced, questioned, and renegotiated.

The Station's process has two stages. First, instead of relying on pre-selected content, the community collects and generates their own linguistic material, such as words, text fragments, symbols, images, sounds, translations, associations or invented terms. Then, the group develops ideas for using various media and approaches to share and communicate the selected material beyond the original activity space. This could take the form of posters, wearable or portable objects, printed materials, recorded sounds or songs, for example.

The station is an artefact that includes simple materials for marking, collecting, storing, connecting and displaying. Its exact appearance and function are co-created by the community that it serves. What is collected, changed, disputed or left out should be documented and carried over into later programmes, professional learning and institutional reflection.

Comprehensive instructions will be published in the spring 2027, but some ideas and activities are already available on the PLURI Project website:

pluri-project.eu/language-station

RECOMMENDATION 1

Accept that multilingual experience is unruly

Educational, cultural and community institutions should acknowledge languaging practices as meaningful forms of communication. Language-related exploration should be supported through activities that do not require perfect language skills, a single language identity or an immediately “correct” product. Contributors should be able to choose which languages, registers and forms of expression they wish to use, and combine them freely.

PROBLEM

Multilingualism is often represented as an orderly co-existence of distinct languages. However, spontaneous languaging mixes symbols and codes, creating hybrid forms and innovations. These unruly forms are not welcome by formal institutions. Schools use assessment based on norms. Libraries, museums and public programmes select who can participate in the choice of language and labelling.

Even well-intentioned multilingual activities can create expectations that participants should make particular languages or identities visible, although they may prefer other forms of expression in that situation.

How the PLURI Language Station can help

The Station creates an exploratory environment in which one works with mixed linguistic and multimodal material. Artistic practices and materials enable contributors to create without demonstrating complete language proficiency. Prompts invite experimentation and play with different resources. The Station supports an exploratory practice. It is not a tool for formal language assessment and cannot replace professional translation or verification for official, legal or safety-related communication.

From PLURI practice

In workshops at a partner school, we invited students to explore different languages, dialects, slang, symbols and drawings. Some chose to work mainly in German, sometimes using youth slang or English. When discussing these choices, students emphasised the importance of being understood. Together, we considered how contributions in the participants' family languages could be made accessible to others. For example, some students suggested using an alternative version represented by a translation in a common language or a drawing. This experience informed our recommendation to respect participants' language choices while actively supporting mutual understanding.

DESIRED IMPACT

People can use various linguistic and multimodal resources, including partial knowledge, without being treated as deficient. They can decide which resources they wish to contribute. Practitioners respond to original unedited contributions.

PRACTICAL STEPS

- Review prompts and activity descriptions for assumptions about fixed language identities or particular language skills.
- Offer different ways to contribute.
- Invite the community to explore and combine languages, registers and forms of expression without requiring particular contributions.
- Respect decisions not to use a particular language. Where appropriate, ask open but non-judgemental questions about what would make participation easier.
- Before making corrections, ask questions that encourage comparison and interpretation.
- Evaluate success through exploration, reflection, meaning-making, participation and the resulting work, without treating a particular number or combination of languages as a measure of success.
- Mark clear boundaries between exploratory material and official, safety-related or officially verified communication.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Co-create multilingual visibility using a democratic process

Institutions should offer opportunities for students, visitors, and community members to contribute to the visibility of multiple languages. Rather than only providing language content, the community should have a significant influence on how that content is chosen, translated, interpreted, placed and presented (within the legal framework).

PROBLEM

An institution can maintain complete control over the appearance, content, and evaluation of multiple languages. Although the community may be asked to translate pre-planned messages or provide words, they have no control over how their contributions are interpreted, edited, displayed, or used in the future. As a result, visibility can continue to be tokenistic or purely decorative, disconnected from regular participation.

How the PLURI Language Station can help

The Station can facilitate a participatory approach to visibility. The community can select materials, propose translations and interpretations, combine words with images or sound, decide what to share beyond the activity space, and reflect on what is missing. The method can make disagreement and competing meanings visible. However, it does not remove the institution's responsibility for safety, accessibility, public communication, and the fair handling of contributions.

From PLURI practice

Students selected messages from the language material they had collected to share with others. They either printed messages, words and symbols on T-shirts that they wore at school or designed posters to display around the school. Some students chose their family languages, others German or English, and some used only symbols. Their choices shaped what became visible in the school and helped us understand which topics and concerns mattered to them. This experience reinforced our view that the community should be involved in decisions about which contributions are shared beyond the workshop and how they are presented.

DESIRED IMPACT

Multilingual visibility reflects the perspectives of contributors and becomes part of shared meaning-making. Institutions retain responsibility for safe and accessible public communication, while the community has genuine and transparent influence over what is displayed and how it is interpreted.

PRACTICAL STEPS

- Identify which decisions the community can make, which decisions are shared, and which must remain institutional responsibilities.
- Invite the community to select words, texts, symbols, sounds, images and associations, rather than only translating content chosen in advance.
- Whenever possible, keep multiple translations or interpretations visible.
- Where feasible and safe, discuss suggested edits, removals, shortenings, and corrections with contributors.
- Provide clear options regarding attribution, anonymity, translation, display, photography, and future use.
- Do not expect anyone to translate, represent a community or act as language experts because of their background. Seek consent, attribute authorship and compensate fairly.
- Use a reasonable moderation process for contributions that are discriminatory, threatening, sensitive or otherwise inappropriate.
- Follow up with a retrospective, when you consider what was left out, who made the decisions, and which languages and viewpoints were made visible.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Secure strategic continuity

Institutions should plan for continuity and transfer from the outset of multilingual projects. The methods, materials and questions developed during an activity should be documented and incorporated into subsequent programmes, curricula, routine activities, professional development or collaborations. Continuity should also enable the community to reflect on observations, develop questions and ideas further, and foster relationships over time.

PROBLEM

Multilingual activities are often organised as one-off diversity events or temporary projects. The event itself might be a success, but when funding runs out, a facilitator departs, or outputs are not documented, valuable resources are lost.

How the PLURI Language Station can help

The Station is modular and designed to be reused. This means that specific practices and resources can be recorded and modified for use in future lessons, library events, museum mediation, community gatherings, or professional development. Lessons from the process can support reflection on what should continue or change. However, the Station itself cannot create continuity. It is still necessary to plan for time, ownership, storage, handover, and partnership decisions.

From PLURI practice

Our work showed that it takes time to notice linguistic practices, to recognise the value of small contributions and to build trust within a group. In our own process, too, some things only became visible at a second glance, such as which languages and forms of expression were present in a space and which were missing. Single sessions left little room to return to such observations and explore the questions that arose. This is one reason why we recommend planning opportunities for continuity from the outset.

DESIRED IMPACT

The value created through multilingual projects remains available after an event ends. Where there is shared interest and capacity, practitioners can modify and reuse techniques, contributors can have an impact on follow-up, and collaborations can continue.

PRACTICAL STEPS

- Before the activity starts, determine which current programme, part of a curriculum, collection, exhibition, community partnership, or institutional goal it relates to.
- Where possible, plan more than one session with the same group, so that observations and questions can be revisited.
- Use an easy documentation template that addresses the following topics: learning, obstacles, participation, facilitation choices, format, materials, and purpose.
- Keep printed or digital resources and reusable instructions and material in a place that is easily accessible to the next user.
- Organize reflection sessions with staff and contributors to discuss what should be kept, changed or tried again.
- Instead of making each pilot a permanent installation, choose one appropriate follow-up action.
- Assign a team or role to handle the follow-up, and decide on a reasonable review date.
- Talk to partners about whether and how connections, resources, or participant contributions can last beyond the project.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Make linguistic diversity everyone's business

Instead of only targeting minority groups, institutions should incorporate language topics into their regular programmes. Mainstreaming should not replace community-specific spaces, targeted support, or language-specific work.

PROBLEM

Multilingual activities are often assigned to language departments, welcome classes, diversity weeks, outreach teams or programmes for migrant groups. This suggests that only minority groups care about it and that only certain staff (e.g. foreign language teachers) are accountable.

PLURI case study

We tested the PLURI Language Station with different groups, including a welcome class, a regular school class, and teachers. Some students initially said "I only speak German", without recognising dialects or youth slang as part of their linguistic repertoire. Meanwhile, with the help of language self-portraits, the teachers recognized that partial competence is part of their linguistic identity, helping them relate to students' lived experience. This experience strengthened our view that engagement with linguistic diversity should be open to everyone, rather than limited to groups already identified as multilingual, or needing language support.

How the PLURI Language Station can help

The Station can be modified to accommodate groups with varying linguistic backgrounds and starting points. Both monolingual and multilingual people may be inspired to explore language, dialect, specialised vocabulary, translation, naming, sound, writing and visibility as aspects of everyday life. Additionally, it can make clear when a group needs a format that is community-led or language-specific. However, the Station cannot replace targeted support or make every programme equally relevant without contextual adaptation.

DESIRED IMPACT

Multilingualism is seen as a normal part of institutional practice. The objective is eliminating assumptions made about certain target groups. Language-specific spaces and targeted support remains available.

PRACTICAL STEPS

- Identify existing occasions where a multilingual viewpoint can be explored without developing a distinct project.
- Present multilingual activities as relevant to those who do not identify as multilingual or only use the dominant language.
- Instead of assuming linguistic identities or needs based on nationality or migration history, tailor your facilitation and prompts to the actual group.
- Maintain language-specific and community-led formats when they meet specific support needs, shared interests, or experiences. The Station is not meant to replace support programmes.
- Promote collaboration between language experts, educators, librarians, artists, outreach personnel, mediators, and community practitioners.
- Use the Station's resources and tools to identify which multilingual resources are already present and what forms of participation remain unavailable.
- Determine whether the responsibility for multilingual practice is shared or if it is a task of a specialist in a specific position.

FOR LEADERSHIP AND FUNDERS

Conditions for implementation

Implementing these recommendations requires institutional support: time for preparation, reflection and follow-up; staff resources and professional development; funding structures that allow work to continue beyond one-off projects; and a clear allocation of responsibility at management level.

We therefore encourage institutional leadership and funding bodies to recognise multilingual practice as a regular part of educational, cultural and community work, rather than as an additional or project-based task.

FURTHER READING

Additional Resources

A roadmap for schools to support the language(s) of schooling

https://www.ecml.at/en/ECML-Programme/Programme-2016-2019/roadmap-for-schools

CEFR Portal

https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/home

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume

Council of Europe (2020).

https://rm.coe.int/16809ea0d4

Language-aware pedagogy at Finnish schools

Repo, E. (2023). Towards language-aware pedagogy? experiences of students in multilingual Finnish schools. *Language and Education*, *37*(4), 460–482.

https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2022.2116985

Research professionals' recommendations to strengthen language awareness and multilingual practices

The Finnish Union of University Researchers and Teachers (Tieteentekijät)

https://tieteentekijat.fi/assets/uploads/2024/11/Kielilinjaukset_2024_FINAL_EN.pdf

PLURI Language Station description and practices

PLURI Website

https://pluri-project.eu/language-station/

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EVERY ACCENT COUNTS.

Plurilingualism for Education Institutions and Community Spaces

PROJECT PARTNERS

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MORE INFORMATION

Scan the code or visit

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