



Network project for the decentralised and centralised
dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

DISSMINATION DOCUMENT – CHAPTER 3

Languages as contact points between the different sectors of education

1. Aims and Issues of Subproject 3

The Concept of the Subproject: Subproject 3 of TNP3 has focused on a new concept in language learning and teaching. It has dealt with issues concerning areas where the different sectors of education meet and interact, i.e. where communication and cooperation take place between different actors/players in language learning and teaching. They are junctions, where on one hand different levels of language education interact and where on the other hand different players, i.e. decision-makers and language providers both on the vertical axis of formal language education and on the horizontal axis of other language providers or language learning opportunities (could) meet. We were interested in the modes, effects, issues and structures, i.e. if and how teachers at different levels, learners, stakeholders and any other partners cooperate and communicate with Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in order to ensure the common goal of enhancing and improving language learning and multilingualism in a life-long-learning (LLL) perspective.

Rationales for the New Concept: In spite of the fact that the learning of languages is generally acknowledged to be a life-long process par excellence and in spite of the various instruments being developed and actions undertaken on the European level to ensure more effective, transparent and comparable language learning results Europe-wide (e.g. CEFR and ELP), language specialists working in the different sectors of education are largely unaware of each other, as are the different sectors of education, the decision-makers and other providers. The goal of the subproject was to look into the practices and experiences of successful interlinking, to detect and analyse the needs and possibilities, where cooperation is not yet in place and could bring about synergetic effects, and to demonstrate, how communication between the different players would benefit both learners, institutions and countries in order for their citizens to attain the goal of mastering at least 1+2 languages. This goal is tied up with general European endeavours: the raising of employability through mobility, the creation of social cohesion, and the fostering of the European dimension.

General themes and aims: Three main issues are at the very heart of the subproject's activities, reports, analyses, and recommendations:

- Facilitating the continuity of language learning (and teaching) by making it more coherent and efficient, a goal to be attained by removing obstacles for a smooth progression and transparent and efficient learning paths.
- Thus making space and enhancing motivation for learning more languages, encouraging and enhancing multilingualism and attaining the European goal of every citizen speaking at least 2 foreign languages in addition to the first one.
- Fostering individual and collective language-awareness processes in the life-long-learning perspective.

The new perspective ties up with the orientation towards outcomes: particularly in language learning the outcome of the learning process must be competence, i. e. the ability of applying knowledge. This is of primary importance for the individual learner and for the professionals in language teaching. With every step of his path towards multilingualism the learner should be able to check the stages of competence reached, and accordingly should be able to choose from a large set of offerings to continue efficiently and without unnecessary delay in the direction set and with the language(s) he/she decides to learn or improve. In order to ensure such a transparent, efficient, individually diverse, therefore satisfactory linguistic progression, professionals from diverse sectors of the language industry and decision-makers are expected to step out, talk to one another and by concentrating on the outcomes of learning processes, optimize the results of their common endeavours. Such an approach will result in raising the awareness for learning languages and making European citizens see the advantages of knowing more languages as well as the need to take them up at different stages of their life.

Role of HEI in this process: One of the main objectives of the subproject was to identify the role of HEI in these processes. As HEI occupy a central position in the process of life long learning, both in terms of provision for the language learner and of producing the human resources needed for language education, they should take the lead in designing language learning scenarios encompassing the whole spectrum of language learning. We wanted to find out how HEI might step in, take up, stimulate and initiate activities encouraging and involving contacts.

2. Outline of the Activities and the Course of the Subproject

In the course of work on the subproject the following main activities were carried out and the following results achieved:

Stage 1: Introduction, clarification and identification of relevant issues concerning the concept in question: decisions on the structure of the national reports dealing with the mapping of existing and needed contacts and interaction, reports on possibly existing examples of good practise. Product: National Reports (NR) and questionnaires on existing interaction on the national level.

Stage 2: On the basis of the national reports a synthesis report (SR) was produced, discussed and evaluated; it was used as a reference paper for the production of a questionnaire in a Europe-wide survey. The questionnaires were translated and a list of respondents was produced: Products: Synthesis Report (SR), workshop reports, questionnaires in 11 languages.

Stage 3: Because of administrative and technical flaws the survey had to be repeated; the interesting consultation results confirmed some suppositions and added valuable information. On the basis of all three stages recommendations and proposals were formulated and discussed in workshops. Products: Consultation results, recommendations and proposals, Final Report.

For concrete examples of interaction and solutions, please consult the NR, the SR, the workshop reports, the Southampton reports on teacher training, and the extensive Final Report on the TNP3 website.

3. Mapping of Contact Points

We started from the assumption that on one hand dialogues were already going on between players but that they were not noticed or generally known, so that they would have to be detected and mapped. In order to make the NR comparable and to get a clearer overview of the various kinds of overlap, the different sectors of education and the various foreign language (FL) teaching providers were structured into a system of co-ordinates. The vertical axis represents the three (or more) levels of the formal educational systems. The horizontal axis brings together all the other formal or informal language providers, such as adult education institutions, foreign cultural institutes, language schools and private language institutions as well as distance learning and e-learning organisations. This was necessary because of the identified heterogeneity and striking diversity in all areas of FL teaching and learning.

Vertical axis: the formal educational sectors and their cooperation and communication with HEI: As universities or similar types of HEI provide the training for FL teachers, cooperation with practitioners on the whole vertical axis, from pre-elementary to upper secondary, should be guaranteed. Needless to say, the main issues here are to enhance the quality of FL teaching and training; this can be only ensured, if there is an ongoing and continuous dialogue between the partners, school teachers being stimulated to express their needs, problems and experiences, university people to devise methods and ways to overcome and solve detected problem areas. Theory and practice must be interlocked and also linked to the needs of the social environment they are part of. In order to guarantee smooth progression and continuity of learning without disturbing breaks, higher efficiency and quality, all educational sectors have to cooperate in the following tasks: curriculum design (for all sectors, also HE), entry and exit qualifications, validation and recognition, policy development, in-service training, student practice or trainees (and mentorship), teaching and assessment methods, esp. with IT-support, development of teaching materials, implementation of EU/EC devised tools, i.e. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and language portfolios, changing

social awareness of the necessity of FL in the life-long perspective, and the promotion of FL learning. In all the above areas some kind of cooperation and communication between HEI and the other sectors of formal education could be detected throughout Europe in the countries described. Nevertheless, even if numerous structural interfaces, points and ways of cooperation and communication between the partners engaged in FL do exist, they are either undetected, scattered, have a reduced range of impact, are limited in numbers, size and effect or they are not exploited to their full potential. Here HEI could step in and improve matters. Where close contacts between university and school teachers traditionally exist, e.g. via mentoring students in pedagogical practice or via in-service training, offered by HEI, these are confined to solving concrete problems and are rarely used to discuss and set about general improvements to the benefit of all. This is especially true for the most important contact area between Upper Secondary and Higher Education, which was focussed in the Southampton workshops of 2005, centred on the exit and entry dimension between the two sectors, while cooperation in LLL and teacher education was the theme of 2006.

Horizontal axis: cooperation and communication of HEI with other FL providers: The introduction of a horizontal axis of FL teaching and learning into the subproject, i.e. the mapping of and interest in all the various providers not included in formal education, from language schools to producers of materials and resources, goes back to several changes in perspective: The Lisbon agenda and the Bologna process focus on employability and so a large part of FL-programme graduates engage in activities and find jobs outside formal education. Therefore, it must be in the interest of all the three parties involved – the students, the HEI and the future employers – to cooperate in order either to adjust university curricula according to the demands and needs of the adult FL education sector or to design additional modules, offering knowledge and the development of competences, necessary for a successful integration into the many niches of FL teaching and as a response to the emerging new profiles in FL teaching and other related professions. The outcomes driven view on education introduces all kinds of possible recognition and validation of informal, experiential learning etc. Communication between the different FL providers and HEI can ensure better motivation for FL learning as well as the use of a common framework and common assessment methods by applying tools developed within the EU/EC (CEFR, portfolios). The increasingly individualized approach to teaching and learning, the demand for a broader range of languages offered and the diminishing financial means in HEI prompt task sharing with external language providers. Coordination of assessment criteria, of exit and entrance qualifications, as well as of curricula according to tools developed within the EU/EC can make progression easier, enhance motivation for FL learning and promote multilingualism. Communication and coordination with producers of teaching materials, e-learning and other resources within HEI that in general up to now have worked only on an individual level would make FL learning more efficient, stimulate autonomous learning, guarantee smoother progression, and benefit all parties involved.

Due to the differences in educational systems, the mapping of the contact points on the vertical axis was complicated and demanding; on the horizontal axis with its extensive dispersion, the large variety of FL providers, and with the scarcity and irregularity of cooperation, data were extremely difficult to gather. Nevertheless, we gained enough insight to produce a needs analysis, a questionnaire for our consultation, a set of recommendations and a number of project proposals on its basis.

4. Needs Analysis and Consultation

The mapping of interfaces on the vertical and horizontal axis identified numerous needs that can be roughly integrated into the following groups:

Development of new contact points: Examples of countries and institutions with comprehensive FL policies and/or consultation bodies possibly on the national level demonstrate successful implementation of FL learning goals by regular and established communication between the sectors. Therefore, the development and implementation of comprehensive and transparent FL policies, action plans and guidelines at all levels of education in the life-long-learning perspective are necessary as well as consultation bodies between HEI, schools, learners, employers and administrative structures. The setting up and funding of a central body to coordinate research projects in language learning, teaching and applied research between the different sectors of education and other stakeholders from the regional to the European levels is a need and would ensure efficient dissemination of results and a higher level of FL teaching and learning in all member states.

Use and expansion of existing contact points: As was identified in the mapping numerous areas could be functionalized to address and implement the initially set common goals by consolidating, enhancing, disseminating, promoting, expanding and funding them. Expansion of cooperation and communication along the LLL line towards early learning on the one hand and adult learning on the other is a priority of most NR and was also stressed in all discussions and workshops.

Smooth transitions and quality assurance and enhancement: One of the central deficiencies in FL teaching and learning esp. in formal education, but also on the horizontal axis is its lack of continuity, transparency and efficient progression. Promotion, dissemination and implementation of CEFR and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) for all levels and all FL providers could improve matters and bring about important psychological and social side effects. Cooperation as a quality regulator and a tool to enhance and ensure quality of FL teachers at all levels should be introduced. The creation of a European FL Teacher Label and regular assessment procedures are to be stimulated as well as teacher mobility and professional development at all levels.

Europe-wide consultation and its results: In contrast with the two other subprojects, the survey of Subproject 3 addressed a defined range of respondents according to the mapping structure, preferably persons dealing

with languages on the vertical and horizontal axes of education as well as in decision-making bodies. The respondents came mostly from educational institutions: all sectors of formal education from kindergarten to universities were included as well as other sectors of language provision from adult education, language schools, and cultural institutes to publishing houses. In its first section the questionnaire dealt with the central question of the respondents' views on the importance of the exchange of experiences, cooperation and communication between HEI and other sectors of education in general and in language education in particular as well as on their opinion of the tasks HEI should take on when interacting with the other sectors of language education. Not surprisingly, but nevertheless largely beyond expectation, 95% of the respondents (2/3 clicking *very important* and 1/3 *important*) stated the paramount importance of cooperation and communication and the leading role HEI have to play in ensuring progression and dialogue. Even if mostly the traditional roles of HEI as initiators, organizers, producers of material, active partners in cooperation as well as producers and providers of knowledge, were stressed, it becomes clear that HEI have to open up and fulfil the trust set in them by the other sectors and stakeholders of language teaching and learning. The message here is clear: HEI should take the lead in bringing together people concerned with language issues, but in doing so they have to consider and take up the experiences and needs of other language providers as well as the possibilities they offer.

The next section listed 15 areas and types of possible cooperation and communication between the different sectors of education and tried to establish the extent of already existing ones as well as the need to strengthen them or to initiate new ones. The slight discrepancies in the results indicated in this section were developed in the next section, dealing with the continuity of language learning and the use of common European standards, into discernable conflicts between intention and implementation, wish and reality, theory and practice. The final section focused especially on the LLL perspective.

The overall impression given by the quantitative and qualitative data available from the consultation leads to some general comments and consequently to some important questions to be addressed in the recommendations:

- A sharp contrast between enthusiastic expression of intent and willingness as well as competence to implement the issues addressed cannot be overlooked, which leads to the question, how partners and stakeholders could be motivated to remove obstacles and to talk to one another.
- There is a remarkable lack of knowledge and thus a need for better information about European policies, initiatives, standards, tools and practices, such as CEFR, LLL, ELP and existing examples of working interfaces, cooperation and communication between different language providers and stakeholders. This raises the question, how language awareness can be enhanced and information and good practice can be disseminated.
- As most of the respondents of the consultation were people interested in language issues and informed about them, the need for innovative

thinking in language education is even more striking. Thus, the question arises how language providers can be motivated to take up new ideas in the perspectives of LLL and multilingualism.

5. Recommendations and project proposals

General recommendations: In the course of action in all three stages of the subproject a substantial number of needs was identified and solutions were formulated. They should be implemented through enhanced, stressed and efficient communication and collaboration between the different sectors of FL provision and can be found in the NR, SR and FR. The following recommendations are to be understood as their common denominator and are the result of a difficult selection process:

HEI are supposed to take the lead in all areas relevant to the issues concerning interaction. They should initiate and enhance cooperation and communication between different language providers and stakeholders. They should inform and disseminate European initiatives, standards and tools BUT they have to address relevant issues of teachers' daily practice, have to listen to the other providers' problems, needs and resources and have to include and motivate experiences from other sectors. They should come up with and disseminate innovative solutions, esp. on how to attain synergetic effects by interfacing.

The set goals could be reached by enabling, creating and supporting interaction via

- regional and local networking,
- new modules and curricula for areas lacking in cooperation and communication with the relevant players in the other sectors of education,
- changing of in-service training,
- stimulating the creation of contact points, bodies for communication,
- transfer of knowledge and collective problem solving.

Motivation seems not to be lacking, willingness for change cannot be doubted and thus should be exploited.

Project Proposals: According to the needs analysis and the above recommendations the subproject identified a large number of project-themes, but the following were chosen and developed as priorities:

Development project 1: CEFR as a general tool to evaluate language competencies across borders as well as different levels of education and sectors of work.

Development project 2: Creation of educational language networks, in which a certain number of HE institutions, schools, and educational authorities from the same area participate.

Development project 3: Creation of a network of centres, provisionally called "Comenius Competence Centres", to enhance the quality of language learning

and teaching through cooperation between sectors, through collection of examples of good practices and through dissemination of these examples.

(Curriculum) development project 4: Fostering early FL learning through continuing education (in-service training) for teachers of young learners (Master's programme).

(Curriculum) development project 5: Creation of modules and/or a European masters programme aimed at the professional development of language teachers active in the adult provider sector, in HEI, cultural institutions, language centres, material development institutions, and other language providing organisations.

Development project 6: Use of and access to native speakers in language education, at all levels from kindergarten to HEI.

Development project 7: Continuous professional development of teaching staff with a special focus on novice teachers.

Research needs: Besides the proposal for a concrete research project, dealing with The effectiveness of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on various levels of education through different regions in Europe, research needs were identified and recommendations formulated to underpin and accompany the developments described above. Applied research in the area of FL interfacing in most countries is a striking deficit, yet surfacing. The envisaged research projects have to reflect the cooperation between educational sectors, should preferably be designed as comparative studies and combine quantitative and qualitative analyses of the effects of successful interfacing, be it on the structural level or in the smooth progression of FL learning

