

Doing Languages, Doing Network, Doing Learning? Discursive Developments of a Virtual Network Project for Language Practice

Clara Keating, Isabel Poço Lopes

Universidade de Coimbra Portugal

ilopes@fl.uc.pt

Abstract

There is a sense in which the use of ICT technologies implodes the somewhat static conceptions of "culture" and "language" that guide many European discourses on multiculturalism, multiculturalism and multilingualism. In computer-mediated communication and interaction in virtual networks, this becomes a crucial issue. Informal language learning emerges, based more on language practicing prone to diversity and hybridity, rather than formal or task-based procedures framed by a pre-defined development of competences in L2. When in a position of preparing a virtual network platform with the explicit aim of supporting and facilitating the practice of European languages by non-native speakers, these issues are very important – they illustrate the ways in which insights on "learning", "learning foreign languages", as well as "practicing languages" are being discursively constructed by the actors involved, framed by their own positions as academics, experts of various kinds, project administrators, teachers, professionals, learners or users of a social network platform.

In this text we aim to discuss how ideas on language practice and learning in informal contexts are emerging and being developed in the process of preparing a virtual network platform. ELVIN (European Languages Virtual Network) is a European Union KA2 Lifelong Learning Programme Project aimed at creating an informal social network to support and facilitate the practice of foreign languages. MyElvin social networking platform connects employees/students for language practice based on their own professional/academic needs and abilities, using all relevant technologies. Elvin Pilot Action #1 was piloted between November 4th, 2010 and December 10th, 2010. Most of the data for this paper stems from the lessons learnt from this experience and from the thinking developed to design the Elvin Pilot Action #2, that are now taking place.