

## ICT-Based Studying Model Supporting Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Development in Continuing Education

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### Abstract

An ICT-based studying model was developed for continuing education to support foreign language teachers' professional development in a regional developing project "LinguaMedia" (2008-2009) of Turku University (coordinator) and its partners: Åbo Akademi University, Lingonet Ltd. and Turku University of Applied Sciences. The model is based on flexibility, community building, sharing expertise and building of the personal learning environments by utilizing the opportunities of ICT. Important goals are to support multilingualism and to create the new possibilities for networking and cooperation for the language teachers, despite of the regional location of their school.

The studying model was widely piloted and tested with nearly 400 Finnish foreign language teachers in a continuing education program "Language Fair" 2009-2011, organized as a part of the national language teaching developing program funded by Finnish National Board of Education. The developing program itself was organized as a part of a national "POP-project" aiming to improve the quality of basic education in Finland. University of Turku coordinated the continuing education program the partners being Åbo Akademi University, Lingonet Ltd., University of Oulu and University of Eastern Finland.

During "Language Fair" program the studying according to a developed model was organized as a process of blended learning, aiming to support the developing work of teaching, to strengthen the teachers' didactical and pedagogical skills, to offer theoretical knowledge based on current research and to promote regional and collegial networking between teachers of foreign languages. ICT had a central role in the process, as another goal was to improve the teachers' capacities to develop modern learning environments, resources and materials for language teaching and learning by utilizing the opportunities of the new media in pedagogically meaningful way. There were four regional face-to-face sessions organized simultaneously in three areas, partly connected online through so-called "mega-conference". Otherwise the studying was based on regional project work and active use of an online platform, a social network and the variety of ICT tools, the main emphasis being in the use of the "open source" software available for free in the Internet. The idea of this approach was to put the theory into practice and to support the participants' "learning by doing", by getting acquainted with the opportunities of ICT in reality. The participating teachers were offered both theoretical and practical knowledge and case examples of the content during the learning process. In the center of attention were the participants' regional developing projects, which they carried out in groups and reported online, using a common platform. The studying was supported by instructive study material and common process feedback at the end of each reporting period. There were stable online forums for support in any matters concerning both the learning content and the technical questions of studying.

According to the feedback the teachers' skills for carrying out eLearning were strengthened during the learning process. Both project activity and attending the social network's theme forums were found to promote collegial networking and sharing expertise and the best practices between the teachers.