



Innovative Language Teaching by International Collaboration

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Abstract

The word “innovative” has a wide meaning – this is certainly agreed upon among language teachers and language professionals. It could be something really new, brand new, something engaging and at the same time pushing but also just totally new – a kind of a revolution. Innovative would also lead to something inventive or ingenious, maybe?

However, in this situation it means something brought into language teaching and this something has to be a new item, never or little done before.

Innovative language learning and innovative language learning could offer many different things for teachers and educators within the language field. Since I am working in the educational and training field for the European programs, I can show you several good practices of innovative language learning – ongoing and finalized and with impact on many fields.

I will give you information about two possibilities of international collaboration. How is it possible for Erasmus+ strategic mobility projects and partnerships to contribute to a sustainable development of the language pedagogy in your organization? How is it possible for the European Language Label to inspire to help producing new, efficient and pleasurable methods within language teaching?

Of course there is a third, a fourth and a fifth possibility of international collaboration. There are even more! Take the chance – why should not your idea, your project or method be considered innovative and qualitative? You never know before you have made an attempt.

Last December, the International Department at Universitets- och högskolerådet, the NA-office in Sweden, invited to a thematic seminar on language teaching in an international perspective on Friday the 5th of December 2014, at the Swedish National Agency for Education, Stockholm.

The seminar was held in connection with the award of the European Language Label 2014.

There was a new concept – to use the European Language Label award to get people more interested in collaboration within the European programs such as Erasmus+ and Nordplus.

http://ec.europa.eu/languages/events/2014/0512-stockholm_en.htm

Why this seminar? The objective of the seminar was to get language teachers together in a thematic way to be able to discuss what a language project of high quality implies and how to reach an increased dissemination of the method, language course or product, which is the result of the project. The focus on this seminar was on success factors, project examples and exchanges of experience, this by workshops and networking (during the agenda of an internal day).

What happened during the seminar? Which contacts were taken? What happened after the seminar?

Overview of the role for languages within Erasmus+

“Multilingualism is one of the cornerstones of the European project and a powerful symbol of the EU's aspiration to be united in diversity. Foreign languages have a prominent role among the skills that will help equip people better for the labour market and make the most of available opportunities.

The EU has set the goal that every citizen should have the opportunity to acquire at least two foreign languages, from an early age.

The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is one of the specific objectives of the Programme.

The lack of language competences is one of the main barriers to participation in European education, training and youth programmes. The opportunities put in place to offer linguistic support are aimed to make mobility more efficient and effective, to improve learning performance and therefore contribute to the specific objective of the Programme.” [Program Guide Erasmus+ 2015]

It is well-known that multilingualism is an important cornerstone and therefore should be treated as such. How do we work efficiently with this cornerstone in our schools and educational areas for language teaching? How do we reach the goals set up and which means/resources must be used? What do we have to change?

In the seminar “Quality, innovation and internationalization in language teaching” some of the best practices of an innovative language teaching for multilingualism were shown and questions were defined, leading to continued teamwork for international collaboration between the participants from the seminar.



Example number one

Ekhagaskolan, Sweden: Language classroom without borders

The project started with the idea of setting up a radio programme with a school in Spain and so an E-Twinning project was on. This resulted in a Comenius project (LLP) with great success, with 8 radioprogrammes, a CD and lots of pictures in a webbased gallery.

Here some information directly from the project:

"The purpose of the partnership cooperation between Cairasco de Figueroa in Spain and Ekhaga school has been to develop our students' language skills and language skills using as many senses and expression as possible. Although only 40 students have had the opportunity to participate in the journey itself, work has encompassed many more students. In an active way, about 200 students have helped to create radioprogrammes, newspapers, pictures, dictionary and various digital and practical sessions which resulted in a large number of learning opportunities. The partnership as a whole has been a positive and fulfilling experience. Together we have been able to dream, plan, implement and evaluate a number of activities that have given life and realized our basic concept of a classroom without borders. In the process, we as members of the project, not only developed the language (Spanish, English) and our IT skills, but also led to a change in our mindset when dealing with culture and its possibilities, differences and similarities." {Claudia Valdivieso, COM07 2010-1-SE1-COM07-04742 1}

<https://classroomwithoutbordersblog.wordpress.com/>

<https://cwbmagazine.wordpress.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6B0OI1OfT8>

http://www.europeansharedtreasure.eu/detail.php?id_project_base=2010-1-SE1-COM07-04742

Example number two

Sundsvalls gymnasium Hedbergska skolan:

Traineeship within the hotel and tourism sector with focus on language training

The background of this project, which is a mobility project within KA1 Erasmus+ (VET learner and staff mobility) was the idea of putting emphasis to modern languages, such as French, German, Spanish and Italian. The students are given the possibility of studying one or two of these languages during one year and within all the programs at Sundsvalls gymnasium. This method increases the chance of more students choosing a modern language during their upper secondary period. To make this possible the hours for language training were coordinated and time scheduled properly in the weekly time table of the students.

Example number three

The ELL winner in Sweden 2013: Möllevångsskolan, Sweden: "Le Grand Voyage" – how to travel without travelling by the help of ICT – a realistic journey without leaving the classroom

The Great Journey/Le grand voyage is a storyline based approach to learning French and French culture. Students in year 9 create characters that are travelling from Sweden to Paris. The students have to accomplish different tasks during their journey to familiarize them with the city, the French culture and the French language. To increase the children's interest, involvement and motivation, the group has been divided into VIPs (excessive budget) and backpackers (very small budget). This economic imbalance allows them to experience Paris in very different ways. The students document their journey by writing a character diary that the whole class has access to as the texts are published on the class blog. The blog lets them take part in each other's adventures and the texts work as example texts for those who need more help. The lesson content, the students' presentations and interesting links are published on the blog. That allows students to share the material at any time and we can flip the classroom. When the students have completed an assignment, the class and the teacher go through it together so that they learn from each other. This is a way of introducing and continuing discussions about the structure of the French language. The basic idea of The Great Journey/Le grand voyage is to put students in authentic learning situations and therefore authentic material is used especially digital content such as videos from YouTube, various French websites but also several apps. Since working with authentic digital material, students are constantly updated with what is happening in France right now. Classroom walls are torn down and we are in Paris for real!

http://ec.europa.eu/education/language/label/label_public/index.cfm?fuseaction=project_award&award_id=9435

<http://pedagog.malmo.se/artiklar/uppdrag-sprakundervisningen-franska/>



As it says in the Program Guide, innovation and good practices aiming to promote language skills can include “assessment methods, development of pedagogical material, research, computer assisted language learning and entrepreneurial ventures using foreign languages. “Long-term training and teaching activities for staff, youth workers and learners also include language learning in a very qualitative way.

“The European Language Label (ELL) award: National Agencies are encouraged to organise - on a voluntary basis - regular (annual or biennial) national competitions in the Programme Countries. The ELL award should function as a stimulus to exploit and disseminate the results of excellence in multilingualism, and promote public interest in language learning”

ELL was an important connection to the former LLP-programme within Education and Training and now ELL will continue as a support to international language education in Europe.

<http://ec.europa.eu/languages/library/publications/7-year-ell-llp-projects.pdf>

The very last idea comes from a preschool and a primary school in the northern parts of Sweden: Umeå, Ersångskolan and Östra Ersboda School:

Ersboda is a multicultural and segregated region of Umeå and the pupils' performance has been low on the joint municipal tests throughout the years. The schools and pre-schools decided to develop the approach and education to help children reach the level of proficiency required for learning advanced academic content. Their policy for language learning is the foundation which guides them in their work.

Background to Language Policy:

“Our society demands advanced communication skills and one of the school's most important tasks is to teach all students to read, understand and use texts. Good reading skills and reading comprehension is crucial for further education because through reading the students provide knowledge and skills in other subjects and are equipped for the future as citizens. The students' vocabulary is a deciding factor for their success.”

Key notes for the policy of Ersboda:

Teachers' attitudes and expectations of the students are relevant to how the students perceive their future prospects. Factors for successful learning in multilingual classrooms are teachers who clarify the school-language, have confidence in the students' potential and with constant challenges direct the students gradually towards linguistic flexibility, where the school codes are incorporated into the students' linguistic repertoire [Damber, 2013]. The teachers have to reflect during scaffolding so the tasks are not simplified but explicitly presented and adequately supported [Gibbons, 2009]. Classroom interaction is particularly important for those students who learn school knowledge in a second language [Wedin, 2011]

The results of the national tests for pupils in the third class show that there has been a clear change in a positive direction.

[Jessica Kristoffersson, Language-reading-writing developer within the municipality of the school]

<http://sprak-las-och-skrivutveckling.webnode.se/>

1. Toohey 2007; Coelho 2012; Leung and Mohan 2004.
2. Damber, 2013
3. Gibbons, 2009
4. Wedin, 2011

After showing the best practices, the seminar changed into workshops for all the participants, who were put into different groups for discussions and planning. The main questions for the workshops were:

- 1) Define the needs for language training in your organization/school/in Sweden
- 2) What does the situation look like for language training in Sweden/Europe?
- 3) Are there any common needs?
- 4) The objective/goal for language training?
- 5) Can you see internationalization somewhere in this?
- 6) What is innovative? Did you get any new ideas?
- 7) What did you learn from the sessions? How can you use the information you have got?
- 8) How can Erasmus+ and the European Language Label contribute to this?
- 9) “Take the plunge” – how?

What happened after the seminar?

- Several partnerships started and many mobility projects were set up
- New contacts were taken, which lead to several plans for future collaboration
- The seminar was spread on the webpage of the EU Commission



- A thematic seminar will be held again here in Sweden in December and now three other European countries are willing to help to organize this event.

Voices from the seminar showed that the participants thought the seminar was very interesting, inspiring, boosting and intellectual.

A very short conclusion for this seminar and an explanation to why you could mention it as an innovative language teaching by international collaboration in integrated ways, following the steering documents for education in Sweden is that you are able to meet, to discuss and to question how innovative initiatives supported by ICT in language learning could lead to international collaboration in the language field.