WORKSHOP ON NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Friday 7th - Saturday 8th June 2002

Handelshøjskolen, Copenhagen (DK)

EVALUATION

Part 2.

by

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A. PRELIMINARY NOTE

This is the second one in a series of evaluations, started with the Curriculum Innovation Subgroup and continued with the New Learning Environments Subgroup. Though these first steps give some indications, the full picture can only be obtained when all three subgroups will be evaluated. It is certainly too early to provide a more general assessment of the responses obtained and this should wait until September

The evaluator knew, already before attending the first meeting, that the TNP is doing a good job and the two days in Copenhagen confirmed this. The meeting corresponded to expectations and was a good learning experience for everybody.

As always, the Copenhagen meeting had good and less good aspects. After all "nobody is perfect", but we hope that the following remarks will be helpful and constructive.

The good points were:
- Good preparation
    - background documents
    - list of questions
    - set of recommendations
    - status report
- Presentations
    - limited in number, which left time for discussion
    - not only local aspects were presented, but also general issues, useful for everybody, such as skills, working in a group, group dynamics, tools, etc.
- Working in smaller groups

What could be qualified as "less good" was, that:
- much have been said about "innovation" in training, in teaching, but very little about learning. Most participants spoke about "their problems", the provision of language teaching envisaged, but the accent should not have been on local problems and input but on European level and on output.
- there was very little said about the "learner" as a social and human resource (do we suddenly all try to appear to be ICT & ODL technicians when we are in such a closed group?)
- there was no reference, no apparent links to:
    - other TNP Subprojects (Curriculum Development, Quality Enhancement)
    - other networks, projects
- there was no explicit reference to Europe-wide:
    - dissemination of 'local' initiatives
    - added value
    - policy making (institutions)
    - Lifelong Learning
    - mobility
    - new projects
    - priorities, even if it was supposed to be on the agenda

The meeting could have been even more productive considering the following remarks:

- It seems that the aims and objectives of the meeting were still not clear to all participants, in spite of the efforts of the convenors.

- The material organisation of the meeting was very good but the relation between the number of hours of lecturing/listening in plenary sessions and working in smaller groups was not ideal. The method of plenary sessions most of the time may not have been the best environment to encourage everybody to participate. There should have been more time allowed for the brainstorming session in small sub-groups with a mechanism involving everybody independently of her/his language competencies. As it was, the small groups 'produced' a considerable amount of ideas in a very short time.

In general, it appears, that:

- even many Committee members do not have a very clear idea of what TNP2 is all about. Maybe this is not surprising given the fact that colleagues are pretty much involved in their daily work. But it would seem that this in itself goes quite some way to explain why there was a certain lack of focus and sense of purpose at the workshops.

- people seem to have an unclear idea of what the Committee, i.e. what they want to achieve. The emphasis is on networking and exchange of experiences – which is fine up to a certain point. However, all of them do not seem to be aware of the fact that they are expected to come up with recommendations relevant to the whole of Europe.

- the workshops showed that diversity is much greater than is normally assumed. There are huge discrepancies not just between Western and Central Europe, but also between individual EU Member States – and between individual countries in Central Europe. In fact, such is the degree of diversity that there is a danger that recommendations targeted at Europe as a whole will be regarded as irrelevant by colleagues/institutions in a number of participating countries.

B. SUMMARY COMMENTS (COPENHAGEN)

Note: The various detailed comments hereafter are illustrated by statistics at the end of the report (Statistics page1 to Statistics page 3). Out of the 26 questionnaire distributed at the meeting 16 were completed and returned.

1. PERSONAL BACKGROUND

  1.1. Gender
     There are 67% F and 33% M among those having answered the questionnaire.

  1.2. Country
     There are 13 identified and 2 unidentified countries involved in this second round of evaluation.

  1.3. Position
     The majority (56%) of the partners are Heads of a Department or a Unit within their institution. There are 44% lecturers, teachers or researchers.

  1.4. Did your institution take part in the phase 1 of TNP Languages (1997-2000)?
     50% of the partners took part in the phase 1, 31% do not know!

  1.5. Is your Institution involved in other European Network/s (Other than TNP Languages)?
     50% of the partners are involved in other European Networks but 25% do not know!

  1.6. Does your institution have a Centre or Department of Languages?
     88% of the partners have a Centre or Department of Languages in their institution.

2. GENERAL AWARENESS OF THE TNP OBJECTIVES
     At the beginning 40% of the partners had none or little knowledge of the TNP objectives. After the various meetings the situation has improved, but there are still only 50% of the partners who are fully aware of the TNP objectives.

3. ABOUT TNP LANGUAGES IN GENERAL
     The majority of participants have a very positive opinion of the TNP Languages.

4. GENERAL ASSESSMENT (after 18 months working in the project)
     There is a good awareness about the aims & objectives, the structure and the activities of the TNP Languages, but almost half of the partners have only little or average knowledge of the products and 69% the involvement with other networks.

     As far as postal communications are concerned, they are considered very poor to average by 95% of the partners, but E-mail communications are OK.

     Partners are satisfied about networking and learning from each other, but there are problems with dissemination of experience and products, as well as generating markets for the products and new ideas and activities for the future.

     Partners appreciate the opportunity to learn, though not enough about the countries (history, culture etc..) which participate in the TNP.

4.6. <u>What did you find most valuable in TNP Languages</u>?

- Helped me to find out more about developments in language education in a variety of countries in Europe. Made me aware that there is potential for more co-operation on language education between partner countries and institutions.
- - collaboration
  - learning & broadening my views on the use of NLEs
- The awareness to the languages prospective (in Europe, at least) questions and a space of share and reflection.
- Exchanging information, ideas, experiences.
- Learning about the European standards in language teaching/learning; making contacts, sharing experience.
- Networking, sharing experience. The opportunity to discuss this vital area of European integration with colleagues from all over the Union.
- Contacts and discussions with experts from other countries; information about language teaching in countries of participants of TNP; information about new developments in language teaching and assessment (i.e. language portfolios) and implementation of common European framework in f.e. Switzerland.
- Discussions among fellow experts
- Develop concept, personal qualification
- Die in den Länderberichten zusammengetragene Information und die Diskussion in den Arbeitsgruppen über Gemeinsamkeiten, die es erlauben, die Verhältnisse dank ihrer Verschiedenheit als Facetten eines gemeinsammen Ganzen zu sehen.

4.7. <u>What did you learn about University Languages teaching</u>?

- Learned about some differences between language education in different countries of Europe and about some key developments taking place in new learning environments for languages.
- - that there is great variety
  - that there are still quite traditional views & approaches which are far from the framework
  - that there are also very innovative approaches under technologically "less sophisticated" conditions
  - that a tailored teacher development programme is desperately needed for higher education.
- Main points: - diversity
  - different goals and issues
  - different "university cultures"
  - and still, points of similarity and opportunity for sharing knowledge.
- Role of language centres is very important in countries outside the Netherlands.
- Different aspects, different requirements & structures, attempts to introduce more unified systems.
- Quite a lot but it is simply not possible to be more specific here.
- Problems our project partners are dealing with and ways of solving them; insight into everyday language teacher's work, planning and carrying out new programmes and courses in language teaching and learning; management of University language centres, developing and testing e-based learning programmes.
- A tremendous amount of things

- Daß dringend das Angebot für die Studierenden aller Fachrichtungen ausgeweitet werden muß.
- Daß das durch die Wanderungsbewegungen enstandene Potential an zwei– und mehrsprachigen Bürgern systematisch ausgebaut und gestützt werden muß, um die weniger gesprochenen Sprachen zu stärken.
- Daß das Lernen von Sprachen eine Frage der Motivation ist; daß also vor allem psychologische Hemmschwellen abgebaut werden müssen.

4.8. Benefiting from attending the general and group meetings:

Did you renew contact with people you had met before?
- No, all were new.

Did you identify any existing projects or group to join?
- Yes, even if I couldn't join in.

Did you get any ideas for new projects or groups?
- Yes, as this group is a "learning source" of new ideas.

4.9. Which two of TNP Languages groups you found most interesting?

Group	Why?
NLE group	My own group, but the topic is of course in need of much action research & collaboration
Curriculum innovation group	Leading directly to pedagogical and curriculum innovation
New learning environments	Closest to my own professional interests
New learning environments	Crucial to language teaching
Curriculum development	Same reason
NLEs	I'm part of it
Curriculum Innovation	Active group
NLE	I don't know in detail all the different subgroups
All of them	
Quality Enhancement	Gibt meine eigenen Hoffnungen wieder.
New learning environments	Reflektiert eine Entwicklung, in die dringend „transversale" Wertvorstellungen eingearbeitet werden müssen.

4.10. Do you have any suggestion about the next 18 months of TNP Languages structure?

- It might be better to have theme-specific subgroups within the actual subgroups – rather than the hierarchical idea of co-ordinator - steering group – subgroup; i.e. the crucial issues discussed & worked upon by small groups within the subproject e.g. after the first year or after the issues have been identified.
- No suggestions
- To achieve and fulfil the political objectives of multi-lingualism in Europe it will be important to allocate funding at European and national levels to create a European language teaching and learning network and agency.
- Das Projekt, wie geplant, zu Ende führen; den Akzent legen auf die Vorbereitung eines Framework für Quality Enhancement in Languages legen.

4.11. Do you have any suggestion about the next 18 months of TNP Languages activities?

- Would it be possible to arrange a meeting between languages experts and people who are not language specialists e.g. administrators of HE institutions? Or representatives of employers' groups etc. Who would have view on importance of language education, etc.
- Workshops should be for working collaboratively, not only lectures & presentations, because to get a scientific committee together is too valuable a resource not to be used more actively! Input is also important, but there should be opportunities to work together afterwards preferably on focussed issues, in small groups.
- Continue co-operation and share experience on a regular basis.
- An agency at European level which can bring together all existing and future activities and serve as a port at call for co-ordination and dissemination of information and experience.
- Integrate research more closely in order to give informed recommendations.
- Die Diskussion über „Schlüsselqualifikationen" und „Werte" in Abstimmung mit dem Tuning-Projekt intensivieren.

4.12. In what ways do you think the work of TNP Languages can be improved?

- We also need input from research to work and reflect upon our own beliefs and routines and widen our knowledge. The target groups of the activities, reports and other info to be disseminated should be more clearly specified so that our work could be tailored in an appropriate way. The political & educational aims should be clear to all participants.
- By defining more common concrete projects.
- Exchange information more often by e-mail
- More precise guidelines and communication from Berlin. More practical work, less policy
- More accent on implementation of the outcomes and recommendations.
- Indem die Sitzungen der einzelnen Gremien systematisch in jeweils andere Mitglieds- und Kandidatenländer verlegt werden, weil den Mitgliedern des Scientific Committee häufig die unmittelbaren Anschauungen nicht nur des Universitätssystems, sondern auch des soziopolitischen Kontextes fehlt.

4.13. Add any comments you have about TNP Languages

- All in all, an extremely positive & challenging experience
- Es handelt sich um ein äußerst wichtiges Unternehmen, das wesentlich von der Person des Koordinators bestimmt ist, der durch eine Fülle von Kontakten und bewundernswertem Arbeitseinsatz die Projektarbeit des TNs auf die politischen Ziele und Notwendigkeiten abzustimmen versteht.