

STATUS REPORT ON THE USE OF NEW LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE LEARNING APPROACHES IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION - based on the national reports and steering committee reports submitted within the TNP2 subproject on NLEs

Anne Räsänen
University of Jyväskylä Language Centre, Finland
(rasanen@cc.jyu.fi)

DEFINITIONS: NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. CREATED BY NEW TECHNOLOGIES, enabling e(lectronic)-learning and teaching, and later also m(obile)-learning and teaching; ie. ICT-ENHANCED LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING;
2. CREATED BY NEW HUMAN RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH MOBILITY ie. USE OF THE PRESENCE AND EXPERIENCE OF MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL STAFF AND STUDENTS FOR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE LEARNING PURPOSES.

DEFINITIONS: INDEPENDENT LANGUAGE LEARNING

1. MANAGEMENT OF ONE'S OWN LEARNING (ALSO CALLED AUTONOMOUS / SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING);
2. LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY OUTSIDE REGULAR CLASSROOM WITH OR WITHOUT TEACHER GUIDANCE (eg. in a self-access centre, abroad);
3. LEARNING ALONE, WITH A PARTNER, OR WITH A SUPPORT GROUP;
4. USING STRUCTURED OR UNSTRUCTURED (ie. AUTHENTIC, NATURAL) MATERIALS;
5. USING NLEs FOR CONTINUOUS, LIFE-LONG LANGUAGE LEARNING; =>

(ie. ILL is seen both as a skill and as a format or method).

POTENTIAL: NLEs AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES COULD PLAY A KEY ROLE IN

- ❖ promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity
- ❖ promoting European co-operation
- ❖ student and staff mobility
- ❖ materials development in less widely used and taught languages
- ❖ proficiency assessment
- ❖ life-long language learning.

BECAUSE THEY CAN

- ⌘ provide "natural", authentic language and culture input,
- ⌘ provide a cost-effective way to offer on-line training in eg. LWULT languages,
- ⌘ assist in becoming acquainted with host cultures,
- ⌘ provide experience in self-directed, independent learning,
- ⌘ promote and develop critical thinking and other life-long learning skills,
- ⌘ foster collaboration and sharing between individuals and institutions,
- ⌘ provide reliable, comparable measures for assessment,
- ⌘ be used for effective and tailored marketing,
- ⌘ provide a channel for carrying out surveys and studies, and
- ⌘ provide a powerful channel for disseminating research information and educational programmes.

SURVEY FINDINGS: OVERVIEW OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURES AND POLICIES IN LANGUAGE-RELATED HIGHER EDUCATION

IN GENERAL:

- ❖ GREAT VARIATION BETWEEN COUNTRIES, BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS, BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS
- ❖ INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE POTENTIAL, BUT LACK OF PRACTICAL KNOW-HOW
- ❖ NATIONAL POLICIES MORE COMMON THAN INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES
- ❖ LANGUAGE-RELATED INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS STILL RARE
- ❖ CURRENT TREND TO TRANSFORM TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE LABORATORIES INTO MULTIMEDIA LEARNING, SELF-ACCESS, AND RESOURCE CENTRES
- ❖ FUNDING MORE AVAILABLE FOR EQUIPMENT THAN FOR USER SUPPORT (even in institutions with good infrastructure)
- ❖ FACILITIES TYPICALLY PROVIDE: INTERNET ACCESS, ON-LINE COURSES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS, DIGITISED MATERIALS, VIDEO-CONFERENCING AND INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES, CD ROM MATERIALS, TV+VHS/DVD
- ❖ MANY VIRTUAL CAMPUS / UNIVERSITY / NETWORK UNIVERSITY PROJECTS BEING DEVELOPED.

CONCERNS & NEEDS:

- ❖ FACILITIES NOT SEEN SUITABLE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING - outdated, not in flexible use
- ❖ FACILITIES GOOD BUT LACK TECHNICAL SUPPORT
- ❖ PEDAGOGICAL GUIDANCE IS LACKING
- ❖ ADVANCES IN NLEs TOO SIMPLISTIC, EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC ISSUES
- ❖ TOO MUCH OF USE IS BASED ON TRADITIONAL MODELS OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION
- ❖ COLLABORATION AND JOINT STRATEGIES ARE MISSING

SURVEY FINDINGS: **PRESENT SITUATION IN INTEGRATING NLEs AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES** *in*

- language teaching for students majoring in languages
- language teaching for students of other disciplines
- language teaching for language-related professions (translators, interpreters, teachers)
- language teaching for students with special educational needs

Main approaches:

ADD-ON – NLEs additional, no changes in existing practice => use unsystematic, based on individual initiative, existing practice transferred to the NLE, often economic criteria

ADD-IN – NLEs integrated, affecting existing practice and professional development => often collaborative effort based on institutional strategies, resulting in pedagogical innovations

TRENDS & CONCERNS:

- ❖ GENERAL INCREASE IN USE, BUT THE FULL POTENTIAL IS NOT USED
- ❖ MASTERY OF TECHNICAL ASPECTS OVERSHADOWS PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES, ALTHOUGH NEW APPROACHES DO EXIST
- ❖ MOST COMMON USE IN THE TEACHING OF STUDENTS OF NON-LANGUAGE DISCIPLINES AND IN IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF PROFESSIONALS
- ❖ LEARNER TRAINING FOR ILL UNSYSTEMATIC
- ❖ NEW ROLES OF “INSTRUCTORS“ HAVE NOT BEEN SUFFICIENTLY EXPLORED (EG. ADVISING, FACILITATING, TUTORING VS. TEACHING) => AFFECTS STAFF STRUCTURES, BUT ALSO PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES
- ❖ FUNDING AND OTHER SUPPORT STOPS AT THE TECHNICAL LEVEL (and is unequal)
- ❖ MORE EFFICIENT COLLABORATION AND JOINT DEVELOPMENT IS NEEDED

PREREQUISITES FOR A SUCCESSFUL USE OF NLEs AND ILL APPROACHES:

- ❖ INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES TO PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTICE AND DEVELOPMENT
- ❖ APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE & CONTINUOUS SUPPORT
- ❖ STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT; NEW PEDAGOGICAL SOLUTIONS AND SKILLS
- ❖ STUDENT TRAINING AND SUPPORT; ILL & NEW LEARNING APPROACHES
- ❖ NEW STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT SKILLS, MENTALITY AND ATTITUDE CHANGE
- ❖ CRITICAL THINKING AND EVALUATION SKILLS TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS
- ❖ CO-OPERATION AND COLLABORATION, SHARING OF INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCE



RECOMMENDATIONS

Tentative recommendations for measures (to be worked upon at the workshop)

(E-European level; N-national; I-institutional)

1. *Development of national and institutional educational visions, policies, and strategies to recognise and foster the value of multilingualism and cultural competence, as well as ICT and lifelong learning skills, as integral parts of academic professionalism and competence. (N/I)*
2. *Improvement, updating, and tailoring of the necessary infrastructure (technical, strategic, staff) to guarantee baseline conditions and to serve the purposes of using NLEs in a flexible way in teaching and for independent language learning (ILL). (I/N)*
3. *Tailored and continuous technical support for actors involved and interdisciplinary co-operation. (I/N)*
4. *Continuous practical and methodological teacher development programmes and pedagogical support tailored particularly for the needs of higher education language teachers. (N/I)*
5. *Reassessment and updating of pre-service education of all language professionals to ensure their future expertise in the field. (N/I)*
6. *Reassessment of qualifications and job descriptions and establishment of new qualifications programmes (e.g. linguistic engineer). (N/I)*
7. *Systematic learner training for independent language learning (ILL) and use of NLEs and adequate support systems. (I)*
8. *Acknowledgement of language studies as an integral part of academic and professional qualifications in all fields, and accreditation and validation such studies as well as independent language learning achievement. (N/I)*
9. *Establishment of common standardised platforms and learning spaces to ensure easy access of resources and expertise. (E/N/I)*
10. *Joint institutional, national, and European projects and action research projects to evaluate existing, and to develop new, programmes, materials and pedagogical approaches which promote multilingualism, use of NLEs and ILL. (I/N/E)*
11. *Encouragement to use common European standards of reference and assessment to guarantee transparency and reciprocal recognition. (N/I)*
12. *Creation of a European language teaching and learning network, which brings together all existing activities and organisations of European higher education institutions and serves as a main port of call for coordination and dissemination of information and experience. (E/N/I)*
13. *Creation of post-graduate and professional programmes whose validation can be recognised by European institutions and be included in universities' career structures. (E/N/I)*
14. *Joint evaluation of effectiveness based on common criteria. (I/N)*
15. *Creation of a systematic approach to facilitating internationalisation at home and inclusion of mobile staff and students into the promotion of multilingualism and intercultural experience. (I/N)*

Summary of needs and tentative recommendations for measures

In order to improve the quality of language teaching at HE level and to meet the challenge of new developments, NLEs and ILL have to be integrated into the teaching and learning process. First of all, the **infrastructure** has to be put in place to meet these new needs and **policies** established to provide a framework for practice. Then, **teachers** will have to be trained to use it and to develop didactically appropriate materials and methodologically sound approaches to teaching and guiding learning in these new environments and to supporting students in their ILL efforts. Thirdly, **students** need to be trained in using NLEs for language learning purposes and in adopting and developing learning strategies needed in independent and self-directed language learning. Fourthly, **dissemination of information** on successful initiatives is necessary. This would promote both **co-operation** between different institutions with the aim to improve the quality of research, development and practice and to avoid the costly duplication of efforts. Interdisciplinary professional co-operation is also necessary, for instance, between language and content teachers and software and hardware designers in order to arrive at suitable applications and solutions for piloting. Finally, it is essential to **ensure that graduates are properly equipped for the future**. This focuses on the development of language graduates whose ability to communicate, teach, and interact in a foreign language is matched with the ability to do so in a variety of environments and through the intelligent use of a wide range of tools (e.g. authoring tools, computer-aided translation systems, computer and videoconferencing systems, electronic forums, online multilingual management systems, and other communications systems). Other graduates must also be equipped so that they have the necessary communication skills for internationalized workplaces and that they will be able to continue and direct their language studies on a lifelong basis in line with what their professional and social life requires.

(Meus & Räsänen 2002: Synthesis Report on NLEs)