

4th CEL/ELC Conference: The Role of Languages in the Area of Higher Education in Europe

Workshop 2: News on New Learning Environments

Workshop 2, Session 1

Friday 27 June 2003, 9.00-10.30

Workshop coordinator: Anne Räsänen

### *Novel teaching - novel learning*

Session chair: Ole Helmersen, Copenhagen Business School, DK

Presentation : Marina Mozzon McPherson, University of Hull, UK

1<sup>st</sup> response: Peppi Taalsa, Jyväskylän Yliopisto, FIN

2<sup>nd</sup> response: Cathy Dantec, University of Hull, UK

Rapporteurs: Brigitte Forster Vosicki, Université de Lausanne, CH,

Doris Flischikowski, Universität Potsdam, DE

#### **Introduction**

The chair introduced the subject by explaining the general aims of the second Thematic Network Project in the area of Languages (TNP 2) and, more specifically, those of subgroup 2: "New Learning Environments (NLE) for Language Learning and teaching in Higher Education". He pointed out that on the basis of an analysis of the state of the art and trends in this area (provided by 21 national reports drawn up by the scientific committee members and compiled together in a synthesis report), the project wanted to develop proposals for strengthening and improving language learning and teaching in higher education. The TNPs also work towards innovation by drawing up recommendations for further action, and by disseminating examples of good practice, with the aim of providing a convincing context for the claim that languages should be placed high on the agenda.

He explained that while session 1 focused on the pedagogical aspects of how the NLE could be successfully integrated into language learning and teaching, session 2 was to concentrate more on the technical aspects. A written version of the presentation had been previously made available to the audience on the Internet and as a hand-out.

Written presentation: <http://www.sprog.asb.dk/elc2003/Workshop2.htm>

#### **Oral Presentation**

Marina Mozzon McPherson concentrated on raising key questions to stimulate discussion concerning future challenges facing institutions, teachers and learners in relation to the creation of New Learning Environments.

She pointed out that not everything that is new is novel or innovative, and that the concept of innovation implies change and transformation in the way humans process and share information, and create knowledge. Flexible, autonomous lifelong learning is essential in this context; NLE require a capacity for constant innovation and adaptation.

She discussed the effect of change and transformation on the way institutions perceive themselves, how learning spaces are organized, how language professionals perceive and develop their role, how language learning is modified and adapted, and how research is carried out.

The questions to be answered included: Is technology a tool for language learning, or is language learning a tool that gives people access to technology? Or are they both tools for individual and societal development? What are the challenges for linguistic research in the field of NLE? Which new skills do language learners need to become competent language users? What does it take to make the transition from classroom to 'cyberspace, and to do it successfully? What are the challenges for language teachers? What new skills do they need to acquire? What are the challenges for institutions? How are universities responding to these changes and demands? What are the challenges for a European education system?

### **1<sup>st</sup> Response**

Peppi Taalas underlined the need to underpin the integration of NLE in a larger vision of enhancement and improvement of language learning and teaching at a global, European, national and institutional level. This means more than the acquisition of linguistic skills; the new (language)-learner needs multiple lifelong learning skills, social skills and multiple literacies (computer, information, multimedia, computer mediated communication) which are vital for all learning. She stressed the importance of integrating all aspects: learning in NLE needs more multidisciplinary research on second language acquisition, as well as a reconsideration of the roles of teachers and learners. Pedagogical redesign has to take into consideration the language user as a member of a learning community, the use of media and face-to-face learning/teaching, the question of assessment which should support the learner and be embedded in pedagogical thinking, and the needs of the learners.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Response**

Cathy Dantec gave a practical example of staff development, the role of human resources, and the training needs generated by the new technology by presenting the Certificate of language advising which is composed of three parts: language learning, management of open learning for languages, and advising for language learning. This programme is delivered through the Merlin platform and acts as a distinctive meeting place and pathway containing presentations, tasks, and sources which aim to develop new professional skills in the context of a professional online community. She defined key aspects of a community as: being a dynamic whole, using common practices, working through interdependence, reaching joint decisions through negotiation, identifying with the group, as well as showing commitment. In this context members of the community reflect on their situation and become aware of where they stand now; discussions on input then provide greater in-depth understanding; and, finally, they give shape to their new understanding by establishing a portfolio.

### **Discussion**

In the discussion that followed, Sake Jager raised the question as to whether it is the role of the language teacher to develop new transferable skills and literacies if these skills are also important for other subjects. Marina Mozzon McPherson answered that the development of lifelong learning skills is a task for everybody and therefore it is also the role of the language teacher to integrate and reflect on these skills in his/her discipline. Our professional role is changing. The implications for job descriptions, time and space management, career paths, and policy making should not be neglected. In this context Anne Räsänen stressed the role that research has to play. The view of languages is changing as well as the view of language teaching. As professionals we should know how

to communicate about our discipline in a wider perspective and also how to influence language policies. Ole Lauridsen pointed out that innovative pedagogical practices have an influence on the technical aspects and have to be incorporated; e. g. the standardization projects for platforms. Several participants discussed the question of traditional approaches and expectations and the difficulty of initiating change and integrating the new skills. Peppi Taalas pointed out that the reason for this could be that often goals are not made clear to students, and a lot is assumed about the learner. Metalevel support and negotiation is needed in order to initiate change. Another issue raised was the relationship of the student to e-learning and face-to-face learning. The two should not be compared, but be used for the things that each can do better, with the possibility of building bridges between them and combining them.