



Project co-ordinator: Wolfgang Mackiewicz • Project manager: Sietze Looijenga
Freie Universität Berlin • ZE Sprachlabor • Habelschwerdter Allee 45 • D – 14195 Berlin
Tel. +49 30 838 53718 • Fax +49 30 838 53717 • email: elc@zedat.fu-berlin.de

**TNP2 PROJECT ON NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS –
NATIONAL REPORT ON FINLAND** (Draft update, Jan 2002)
Anne Räsänen, Jyväskylä University Language Centre

1. General introduction

The higher education system of Finland is composed of universities (20) and vocationally oriented polytechnics (29). All universities are state universities and provide education free of charge. Polytechnics are either municipal or private, but all education leading to a degree is also provided free of charge. All higher education degrees require a compulsory language element in the mother tongue, the second national language (for the majority, Swedish), and one or two foreign languages. The extent of the language requirement varies from 6 ECTS credits to almost 60 ECTS credits, depending on the field. This language education is provided at universities by the language centres, which were established some 25 years ago and which cater for the students of non-language disciplines. Language and philology departments, and schools of translators and interpreters cater for the language professionals. In the more recently established polytechnics, professionally oriented language education is usually provided by either field-specific language units or by language centres.

As regards the use of information technology in our education, Finland has had an officially approved information society strategy since 1995. It is founded on a vision of Finland as a network society with an active role in developing applications of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and related industries. The strategy emphasises the fact that IT and information networks are major tools in all spheres of life, that solid expertise in ICT is essential, that all citizens should have basic IT skills, and lastly, that a competitive and effective information infrastructure must be created (Finland towards an Information Society, 1996). As a result of this emphasis on basic IT skills and professional expertise, the educational system and various forms of lifelong learning have emerged as key areas for implementing the national strategy. (Sinko & Lehtinen 1999:13). Higher education institutions have, in most cases, also established their own general information society and internationalisation strategies.

Although the national strategy described above only dates back to 1995, it was as early as in the 1970s that discussions of the future of the education system started to pay attention to the opportunities provided by ICT in teaching and learning. Large investments in purchasing information technology for schools and educational institutions have been made since the 1980s, resulting today in a relatively well-developed infrastructure which covers the whole educational system, from the primary throughout the tertiary levels. One indication of the infrastructure is the number of computers at the disposal of pupils and students – in 1998 the average pupil and student/computer ratio was 14, while in some technology-oriented areas of education the ratio was already approaching 2 (Sinko & Lehtinen 1999). At most universities,

teachers and researchers have their own personal computers, and local networks are more and more accessible also from home, particularly from the student houses and villages. The use of the Internet and the university network services has, thus, become more and more generally accessible from the home computers of students and staff. In addition, there is, naturally, an increasing number of workstations available in the institutions.

One culmination point in implementing the national information society strategy in higher education was the founding of the Virtual University of Finland (www.virtuaaliyliopisto.fi) in 2000. The consortium agreement for the Finnish virtual university was signed by all universities, and the aim is to develop and execute a network-based educational system based on multimedia distance learning. The Finnish virtual university will offer degree programmes from undergraduate to postgraduate degrees, as well as Open University and continuing education. According to the forecast of the Ministry of Education, the virtual university should be in full operation by the end of 2004. Each partner university will select its own students and confer its own degrees. The students and teachers are served by a joint university network called FUNET, and a joint portal is presently being set up. In addition, links will be available to the previously established digital university library service and the virtual Open University, as well as to the Virtual Polytechnic of Finland, which is under construction. The fact that the virtual institutions of higher education will also offer degree programmes – with compulsory language requirements - will also necessitate the building of a Virtual University Language Centre of Finland. This planning process has also already started. All these projects are initially financed by the Ministry of Education.

Besides the new learning environments created by ICT, the rapidly increased mobility of students and staff also provides a great potential for learning, and language learning in particular. Naturally it also offers opportunities for increasing intercultural competence and skills. In the case of incoming students and staff, mobility promotes the learning of Finnish and to some extent also Swedish, with increasing needs for course and materials design for network-based and distance learning. The same is true for outgoing students in that they, too, need at least introductory courses in the LWULT languages spoken in their host countries, preferably accessible before departure. In addition, at least in most LWULT countries, mobility has created challenges for developing international programmes where some “major” language – usually English - is used as the medium of instruction. This, in turn, has brought about needs in training both students and teachers to learn and teach academic disciplines through a foreign language. Several in-service development programmes have been organised in Finland since 1994 to this effect, particularly by Jyväskylä and Helsinki university language centres on the basis of assessment surveys done in the country.

The e-learning solutions, ie. activities carried out by using electronic information networks (eg. Internet, intranet, extranet, video materials, CD ROMs, satellite communication, interactive digital TV, etc.) have increased the efforts to create special network-pedagogical approaches to both content and language learning and teaching. Network pedagogy in the Finnish context usually refers to expertise in web learning, network courses, computer-assisted learning and digital collaboration, as well as to virtual classes and various types of NLEs. In the future, the second generation Internet applications will also emphasise interactive multimedia and mobile applications (usually referred to as m-learning), and for

instance, language courses for m-learning are already being designed. One of the features emphasised in the discussion around both these solutions, as well as in the whole context of learning in a virtual environment, is to try to create the “human touch” to these distance learning experiences so that they would not only be seen as mere technological skill and know-how. In terms of language and cultural learning, in particular, there are certainly many characteristics in human behaviour and interaction that cannot be transferred via technology or media.

It is obvious from the above that the situation and spread of ICT-enhanced education in Finland is changing so rapidly that a comprehensive national survey is practically impossible. The general trend in higher education language teaching, however, seems to be from individual projects and efforts to joint ones both within and across institutions. This is clear from the survey done among teachers and from the web surveys addressing the range of network-based language education and learner training available in Finnish institutions of higher education. Since the ICT infrastructure was not seen as causing any considerably obstacles to e-learning approaches, the status report below, thus, will focus more on the pedagogic and strategic solutions adopted by institutions. The questionnaire sent to polytechnics, which are presently reforming their discipline-based language teaching and assessment systems, was also used as the basis of interviews and web surveys, and included the following items and questions:

1. Please estimate to what extent (%) the use of new learning environments (NLEs) (defined as e-learning environments and the new opportunities for language learning (LL) created by student and staff mobility) in the language teaching of your institute has increased over the past three years.
2. Please estimate and describe to what extent (%) the new human resources (visiting students and staff) are being “used” as a NLE (ie. for systematic rather than incidental LL) at your institute and for which languages.
3. What kind of student counselling or advising is used to enhance independent language learning and the use of NLEs (eg. learning strategies, tutor groups)?
4. What kind of teacher training has been available for the use of NLEs in language teaching (LT) (eg. Internet, WebCT, network pedagogy)?
5. If NLEs are being used systematically in your contact teaching or to complement it, how is student progress being monitored and measured?
6. Do you co-operate in this field with partners at home or abroad, and if you do, to what extent and in which ways?
7. Have you developed joint institutional strategies for your LT in general, and if so, what kinds of strategies?
8. Please describe what kinds of problems, future challenges and needs there are in the more effective use of NLEs at your institute.
9. Please describe successful cases/courses/projects which have made use of NLEs.
10. Other comments and viewpoints.

Since the return rate of the questionnaire was only some 35%, interviews and web surveys were also conducted to produce the report below. As more information becomes available continuously, some areas listed in the headings and subheadings are not yet addressed at this

point. The final version of the report prepared within the ongoing TNP2 project will be handed in by September 2003.

2. Role of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

2.1. Integration of New Learning Environments in language teaching and learning

On the basis of the surveys and interviews it seems that ICT-enhanced approaches to HE language teaching and learning have increased over the past three years by at least 30 %. The field is particularly active in the teaching and learning of English, Swedish and Finnish as second languages, but some network-based approaches have also been implemented for French, German and Russian, as well as for various LWULT languages. These trends are particularly clear in the case of teaching students of non-language disciplines and in preparing students for study abroad and for their professional life. Various universities and polytechnics have been engaged in joint projects to develop language learning and assessment materials to be used as a complement to contact teaching. These materials are usually discipline-specific and professionally oriented, and focus, for instance, on academic reading and writing strategies in various languages, business and culture oriented and science and technology oriented academic language, as well as introducing Finnish as a second or foreign language.

As regards the potential offered by the new human resources which have become available through student and staff mobility, the surveys indicated that there do not seem to be any systematic pedagogical approaches that would be used, say, for increasing interaction between mobile and non-mobile local students for language and culture learning purposes. This does not mean that there would not be individual efforts to this effect, since briefing and debriefing are in fact quite commonly used and some language teachers have tasks whereby students have to attend and report on lectures given in a foreign language or work together with international students, but the respondents were in most cases not able to answer the question about the extent and ways in which this new, potential language and culture learning environment is being used at the institutional level. This implies that more systematic joint approaches are still lacking.

2.2. Policies underlying the integration of New Learning Environments

At the moment only a few universities and even fewer polytechnics have their own official strategies or policies about the integration of NLEs into language teaching. The reaction to this issue in the survey was rather ambiguous; on the one hand, the potential was acknowledged particularly in terms of the future skills required from professionals and as part of the information society strategy, and, on the other hand, many teachers seemed to feel a lot of pressure regarding this issue and were not quite confident as to how they could manage the situation and how it would affect their work. In other words, there is probably some uncertainty about how their employment situation will change with this, as well as worry about whether their own IT skills and pedagogical approaches will be sufficient and suitable for using NLEs for language development. However, there is also great variation in this at

present, and some language centres and units are already quite far in establishing their own policies for the issue.

2.3. New learning strategies: the introduction and promotion of independent learning

Learner training for independent language learning has been particularly attended to at university language centres and less so, until now, in polytechnic language teaching – at least as far as what is revealed by documents. This is probably due to the fact that polytechnics are relatively new institutions, still reforming their curriculum contents to move from the previous college-level teaching to the higher education level also in language teaching. Another reason might be that polytechnic degrees include, in many cases, compulsory study and work practice periods abroad, and the development of language studies at home has concentrated more on preparing the students for the international workplace rather than on other pedagogical innovations. In addition, there exist many polytechnic degree programmes which are run through English, and much energy has also been devoted to supporting the students and teachers involved in these. However, it can be predicted that learner training for independent language learning will be a focus area also at these institutions in the very near future. On the basis of the survey results, such training is at present limited to the teacher giving advice and counselling, but no overall institutional policies or approaches seem to exist. It should be pointed out here that developing life-long learning skills and critical thinking skills in general is an important aim recorded in the national curriculum documents of all levels of education in Finland, as is promotion of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

General technical training for the development of students' ICT skills is provided widely by all institutions (and at all educational levels) because of both the implementation of the national information strategy and because of rapidly increasing e-learning approaches of content area teaching. Mobile HE students are also provided this training by all institutions. Specific technical training for ICT-enhanced language learning is usually available at language centres and units.

As regards the university language centres, then, learner training for independent language learning has been an active area of experimentation and action research for several years already. Most centres have some established policies and principles regarding this because of the fact that they have established learning centres or self-access facilities (to replace or complement previous language laboratories). The setting up of learning centres has also meant that learners need proper instructions on how to go about learning language independently. Therefore, most language centres already have learner training modules or materials to guide and counsel students in their efforts. Independent language learning issues are also promoted in portfolio projects. Again, it should be noted that many HE institutions have *general* learner guides to independent learning on their web pages, but *language learner training* materials are a more recent development. Proficiency self-assessment tests for students to monitor their progress are also becoming more and more common, particularly within the network-based language programmes that have been developed. Much of the initial development work on promoting independent language learning and ICT-enhanced language teaching approaches was done over the three-year period starting in 1996, when the Ministry of Education

allocated special funding for the development and diversification of language education at universities. In 1999 similar funding was allocated to polytechnics.

Building learner autonomy, and the learner skills that enable its development, has also been one of the key areas of language centre research, most notably at Helsinki and Jyväskylä universities, both of which have been engaged in comprehensive research and experimentation in this field and also reported on their approaches. At Helsinki, autonomous language learning developments and experimentation have largely concentrated on English (the ALMS approach) resulting in a well-researched and established system of independent language learning. At Jyväskylä, on the other hand, promotion of learner autonomy has been adopted as a departmental policy and thus integrated into the teaching of all languages available at the language centre. Therefore, special language-independent, as well as language-specific, courses and modules addressing learning-to-learn issues have been offered there since 1993. The information and data gathered in this way has also been used as a source for staff development. In addition, issues described below (2.6.) have been particular focus areas for both learner and staff development at Jyväskylä University Language Centre.

2.4. Facilities for independent learning

As was mentioned above, most university language centres have transformed their previous traditional language learning laboratories into modern multimedia laboratories and self-access centres. A similar process is being carried out in polytechnics. The general infrastructure for ICT-enhanced or e-learning of languages is relatively good, as was described in the introduction.

2.5. Development of learning materials

Due to the availability of ICT technology, materials and course development have also been active fields of development. The general trend is from individual teachers' efforts to more systematic programmes developed and offered jointly through institutional networking. For instance, seven polytechnics introduced recently their joint language teaching modules in business and engineering English and Swedish, as well as German for study abroad purposes and advanced Finnish for foreigners. This project used the WebCT as the platform. Helsinki University of Technology has also developed several discipline-specific materials and courses, and several university language centres are joined in using and developing Swedish and English studies in a joint language network. Videoconferencing is also used by several university language centres, and many materials have been developed for discipline-specific academic reading and writing, including several links to dictionaries and other reference materials. Finnish as a second/foreign language materials are also available (eg. Tavataan taas! at [http://donnerwetter.kielikeskus.helsinki.fi/FinnishFor Foreigners/](http://donnerwetter.kielikeskus.helsinki.fi/FinnishFor%20Foreigners/)). The Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä is involved in several international projects (eg. Tallent – teaching and learning languages enhanced by new technologies, AirLine Talk – English, German, Spanish, French and Italian for airline and airport staffs, and ICT4LT – Information and Communications Technologies for Language Teachers, including English, Italian, Swedish and Finnish). In addition the Centre is involved in expanding language technology instruction into a national co-operation network, which is a project

funded by the Ministry and running in 2001-2003. In connection with this project, the Centre has also started a training programme in the area of language teaching and learning in the autumn of 2001 (see 2.7. below). Pedagogical aspects are also treated in eg. a joint project (SHAPE) between Oulu and Jyväskylä university aiming at the development of network pedagogy for learning at university and at work. This project is funded by the Academy of Finland.

A key issue in ICT materials development in Finland, and abroad, is to avoid the situation where mere traditional approaches to language teaching and learning and material design are simply transferred to the electronic environment, resulting often in a more restricting learning environment than what a live classroom would offer. Also, efforts should be made to attend carefully to the ways in which the materials can be used by also groups of learners, and not only by individuals, ie. to keep in mind that independent language learning does not necessarily mean learning alone and that most aspects of language use require interactive practice. Yet another aspect is learning task design for the use of authentic and natural language input, whether this is available on the Internet or provided by the new human resources created through student and staff mobility. Developing an operational ICT environment for collaborative language learning programmes and tasks will probably be the greatest challenge to face language teaching and learning in particular, because language and communication are creative and interactive by definition and some mechanical practice will not enable achievement in this respect. Therefore, the creativity aspect and the potential offered by ICT should be combined in a pedagogically sound way in learning task, materials and programme design.

2.6. Redefining the profile of the actors involved

It is inevitable, and has been established by all research and experimentation, that independent language learning requires changes in the roles of both students and teachers. For the students, it means taking responsibility for and making decisions about setting individualised and personal goals for LL, selecting suitable input and materials, monitoring own progress and redirecting it if need be, managing time and effort, as well as assessing achievement in terms of the goals set. For the teacher, it means, most of all, allowing the students to take this responsibility and to make the decisions, as well as facilitating the whole process. This is true both in cases where self-directed LL is integrated with contact teaching as its complement and in cases where students are engaged in self-directed or independent LL on a totally self-access basis. The type of learner and teacher autonomy that is required in the process is not an automatic ability of either party, but a characteristic that presupposes a heightened level of awareness and critical reflection, because it is both a psychological and a strategic process. Thus, the teacher in his/her new role is faced with a highly sensitive task, the successful accomplishment of which is dependent on the teacher's ability to move along the continuum of authority and counselling (ie. in the roles of an expert authority, facilitator, adviser, counsellor - or whatever term one wishes to use) in a flexible way depending on what kind of support the student needs at each point of his/her learning. The student, on the other hand, needs to know enough about his/her own process and preferred ways of LL and understand which factors in his/her particular case foster or prevent LL. In order to make the required decisions, the student must also be able to critically evaluate language materials – whether

structured or authentic – in terms of their potential for providing the kind of input and practice that is needed to reach the goals set, as well as engage in the kind of a learning environment that will enable LL to happen. In other words, because certain skills can only be learned through interaction with other people, the students should be able to assess their goals also from this perspective. In fact, peer groups and the teacher's support in this process are of great significance, although the format is not what is traditionally seen as language “teaching”. The main shift, then, in considering independent language learning and learner autonomy is the comprehensive focus on the *learning of the individual*, which is of course also the outcome of the prevailing experiential and socio-constructivist general learning theories, as well as the essence of the learner-centred or learning-centred approach to language (and other) teaching.

While many teachers welcome the use of NLEs as a valuable resource for developing skills for independent LL, there are also many who tend to feel threatened by the “loss” of authority and control that is its prerequisite. This is probably one reason for which some of the network-based LL courses and materials appear to be even more “traditional” than actual live classroom environments, although naturally there are also technical constraints that have been present. Because many technical obstacles, however, have been removed or at least can be circumvented, it appears that more attention should be paid to the psychological constraints which prevent the redefinition of the roles of learners and teachers for successful independent LL. It is also in this way that we will be able to develop a much wider repertoire of pedagogical approaches to the effective use of NLEs in language learning and teaching.

2.7. Training programmes and courses for language teachers: in-service programmes, staff development

Due to the prominence given to the implementation of the national information strategy and possible institutional strategies, ICT skills training of all teachers has been a very active field in Finnish education in general. It is not possible or even necessary to list the courses and in-service programmes that are potentially available for also higher education language teachers –should they find time to participate in these and after that to experiment themselves with what they have learned. However, most HE language teachers tend to feel that, although the technical resources are adequate and their use in research and administration is more or less a rule, there is still too little technical and pedagogical support for the integration of ICT in actual teaching, because learning to use ICT for teaching purposes in such a way that one feels confident about it requires a considerable investment of time and patience, and initially also increases the teacher's workload. Not having being able to assess or regulate, for instance, how much more contact “distance”-learning approaches actually might generate when compared to more traditional classroom approaches has been quite a surprise for many ICT enthusiasts. This issue, as well as a more holistic view of the pedagogical use of NLEs in language teaching and learning, has not been addressed to a sufficient degree in the existing training programmes. The courses have tended to provide detailed information from a narrow point of view, but a more comprehensive approach would be needed particularly for the development of versatile pedagogical strategies.

The situation described above, however, is expected to improve considerably within the next few years as tailored language technology instruction for teachers becomes more widely available. The Centre for Applied Language Studies of the University of Jyväskylä has been particularly active in its efforts, and an extensive programme on ICT-enhanced, web-based and network-based language learning and teaching has been in operation as of September 2001. In addition, in the summer of 2001, a new Graduate School in the field was launched by the Ministry of Education. This is a network-form school, coordinated from Helsinki University, and operating within the national KIT-network, which connects most Finnish universities. As was also mentioned above, the polytechnics are in the process of reforming their language teaching and assessment systems, which will undoubtedly also generate similar efforts.

According to the surveys and interviews, there is quite a lot of variation (30%-100%) in what proportion of the language teaching staff have taken part in in-service or staff development programmes in the use of ICT in teaching. Yet, only approximately 30 % of them, on average, are *active* users of ICT and NLEs. Most of the respondents indicated that they do not feel confident about their skills – referring to both technical and pedagogical skills. Thus, all projects addressing the pedagogical side of making use of authentic and virtual NLEs would be most welcome, and quite a few efforts to this effect at both institutional and joint institutional level are already being taken. Promoting the learner and teacher skills needed for the use of NLEs in LL have been attempted more systematically, for instance, by several university language centres and also teacher education departments as was explained above.

2.8. Measuring proficiency and progress: assessment and self-assessment

Many in-house network-based courses developed also include proficiency assessment tools for teacher, peer and self-assessment. These also concern progress measurement during the process of learning. A good example in promoting learner and teacher skills in progress assessment is the Multilingual Language Portfolio Project of Oulu University Language Centre. However, only a few include any systematic tools for measuring either proficiency or progress in the case of eg. authentic Internet materials use for independent language learning (ie. in courses which have incorporated such practice). In most these cases, portfolio assessment is in use, but more attention to this is definitely needed, because one of the biggest problems that independent language learners have in general is that they have trouble in assessing whether they are proceeding in the desired direction. Thus, some feedback to this effect is essential in fostering continuous motivation in self-directed LL. The DIALANG system, when fully operational, holds a great deal of promise in this respect, too.

2.9. Action research on the implementation of New Learning Environments

Quite a few *individual* teachers are engaged in continuous action research to develop their own approaches to and ways in which they might implement NLEs in their teaching, but institutional approaches are still rare, particularly as regards the range of languages involved. Systematic *departmental* action research on the prerequisite learner qualities needed for the use of NLEs and for independent language learning has been carried out at Jyväskylä University Language Centre since 1993, as was explained above (2.3.). This action research

has had two aims: learner training and staff development, and the ongoing third cycle, in fact, focuses on the development of ICT-enhanced pedagogical approaches. The previous cycle ended with the establishment of a general pedagogical framework for learner and teacher autonomy development, as well as experimentation with speech communication learning tasks across languages.

On the basis of the surveys and interviews it is indicated that joint collaborative action research between institutions would greatly benefit a wider and more insightful use of NLEs in tertiary-level language education.

3. Promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity

3.1. Promoting the learning of the less widely used and less taught languages

It is both natural and self-evident that multilingualism and LWULT languages have been seen very favourably in the Finnish context, which is also reflected in the official status and prominence of language studies in all education. However, there has been a recent shift in the views regarding how many languages Finnish pupils and students should actually be required to learn and to what level, and the number of compulsory languages that have to be taken before graduation from the upper secondary level has in fact been dropped from four to three (including the national languages). Thus, although the European Union recommendation of three languages might not even need to be reconsidered in our context, special measures (eg. funding) have been taken by the Ministry of Education and other educational bodies to actively promote the learning of more than one foreign language (which in most cases is English). These measures have also concerned higher education. Thus, we have been approaching a situation in which two FLs are required for the university degree, but some students have only studied one at school and have to start from the basic level at the university. This means, for instance, that university language centres have to devote quite a lot of time and resources to offer language teaching which would previously have been the responsibility of the school. Fortunately, there is quite a lot of pressure from the labour market towards valuing multilingualism, which will hopefully at least provide enough information for the upper secondary school students so that they will select new languages on a voluntary basis with their future careers in mind.

The public opinion of the importance of foreign languages in our context is, and has been, very positive. This was indicated, for instance, by the recent Eurobarometer survey (December 2000), where half of the Finnish respondents stated that they would like to learn some new language if they had a chance to do so. In the same survey, some 90 % of Finnish respondents (along with the Greek) felt that special measures will be needed to protect their own language within the expanding EU, as opposed to the average figure of 68 % among all respondents. Besides foreign language competence, then, there is also a high regard for mother tongue skills that is present in the public opinion about language competence in the Finnish context.

As a rule, Finnish higher education institutions offer opportunities for the learning of very many foreign languages either through contact teaching or in self-access format. The range of

languages taught for professional purposes is also quite high at all institutions because of the statutory degree requirements.

3.2. Promoting cultural understanding and intercultural awareness

Cultural studies, cultural understanding and intercultural competence development are key areas of all Finnish HE language teaching, whether for actual language professionals or for non-language specialists. Besides specific programmes and courses which are also offered by several institutions, practically all university and polytechnics language teaching has cultural understanding and intercultural awareness building as a focus area, mainly because of the emphasis on the development of professional skills for the workplace. Even more attention is paid to this when students are prepared for their study or work practice periods above. However, more work is needed to make “use” of both student and staff exchanges as a NLE, in other words, language teachers should become more aware of the fact that both home-coming and visiting students and staff could offer a new human-resource-based NLE for the language and culture learning of the non-mobile academic community, and that good pedagogical approaches to this should also be developed. According to the survey and interviews, this NLE seemed, in most cases, to be a totally new and unused LL potential, at least in the institutional sense.

4. The role of New Learning Environments in training programmes for language and language related professions

There are at present very few more comprehensive approaches to the use of NLEs in the training of language professionals per se. However, judging from the information elicited on teacher education departments, general educational technology and virtual pedagogy, as well as design of digital materials are well represented. Also, direct linking to dictionaries and reference materials are systematically provided, but more extensive and strategic departmental approaches seem to be relatively modest in the basic training of language-related professionals.

Many universities are in the process of restructuring, evaluating, and reforming of their curricula for also language professionals, which will most probably result in introducing new approaches to NLE use in the programmes offered.

5. The role of New Learning Environments in continuing education programmes or courses

Multimedia and distance learning solutions already have a long tradition in continuing education and in Open University studies. Tertiary-level language education, however, is not yet readily available, but rather, ICT is at the moment used more for basic business language teaching and lower level language education. No doubt this situation is also rapidly changing, and for instance the extremely extensive operation of the Open University will in the near

future increase the use of e-learning approaches to advanced-level and professionally oriented language learning and teaching. Following the national information strategy also, a great deal of attention is being given to providing training in basic IT skills also for the retired population as well as for marginalised population, which is naturally also the first step towards promoting independent study in general.

6. Possible uses of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for promoting European co-operation and present needs in the area

6.1. Using ICT for co-operation in the development of programmes

Although there are already quite a few programme design projects being developed jointly by several European institutions of higher education, the co-operation is in no way systematic enough nor does it address all issues involved. For instance, evaluation of the existing language teaching materials available on the Internet, which greatly vary in their quality and focus, as well as the development of pedagogically valid learning tasks to be used for the abundance of authentic information available on the web pages are areas where institutions might join their forces, because these kinds of tasks demand a great deal of time and expertise and are extremely difficult to do at the individual or institutional level. Concerns and wishes to this effect were expressed by several respondents in our survey. Similarly, labour market developments and language learning demands arising from this mobility were suggested as preferred areas of co-operation by some polytechnics.

6.2. Using ICT for co-operation in the delivery of programmes

ICT could easily be used to deliver, for instance, basic or survival level courses in the LWULT languages for student and staff exchange. Although English might be the language used for communication and teaching, it is still essential for the purpose of social inclusion to master the language of the host country at some level. On the other hand, offering such language courses at the home university prior to departure might not be possible, or even feasible. If they were delivered by the host country in electronic form, and if eg. buddy systems were established prior to the departure, both parties in the exchange would greatly benefit from this practice particularly in terms of developing multilingualism in Europe. Needless to say, there are also other possible ways of enhancing European co-operation, understanding, and intercultural awareness, as well as fostering growth of professional expertise, for instance, through offering learner training courses or intercultural studies. The success of such courses, however, is very much dependent on the development of sound pedagogical solutions for ICT-enhanced learning and teaching in general. Thus, action research in this area is badly needed, and should be the initial phase of such efforts.

7. Needs and measures in the area of New Learning Environments

Although there is a continuous need to develop the technical skills of all parties involved because of rapid changes in ICT, by far the greatest needs for the present and the future have to do with the pedagogical approaches that are suitable for learning and teaching languages within the contexts of NLEs. In most cases, the measures to be taken permeate all levels, i.e. some start with the individual level but soon need to expand from this to the institutional and regional levels, as well as the national and even European levels, whereas in some cases the direction might be an opposite one. This is because, in most cases, actions at one level will benefit another level provided that there is active interaction and sharing of information and solutions between them. For this reason, the level at which measures should be taken is only indicated below in cases, where they are clearly restricted to one or two levels given in the grid.

7.1. Needs and measures seen in relation to language teaching and learning

The surveys and interviews indicate that the following needs seem to have prominence in the Finnish context of NLE use in higher education language learning and teaching:

- More tailored development of ICT skills of both teachers and learners on a continual basis for language learning and teaching purposes, as well as for the professional labour contexts of Europe in general;
- More systematic learner training for ICT-enhanced and independent language learning and development of support systems for this;
- Specially tailored learner training for students with special educational needs;
- More systematic teacher development to foster independent language learning and the use of NLEs;
- Continuous technical and pedagogic support for teachers.
- Introduction of flexible, versatile, and user-friendly learning platforms for network-based language learning and teaching.

All the above would be greatly facilitated by policy and strategy decisions taken at least at the institutional level. Furthermore, the focuses for the pedagogical development include:

- Development of a range of good and pedagogically solid language and culture learning tasks for NLEs (both ICT and the NLEs created through mobility).
These tasks should have variable, identifiable focuses, for instance, they should be
 - a) suitable for managing authentic (natural) language;
 - b) require interaction and creative language use;
 - c) develop students' skills in critical thinking and evaluation;
 - d) provide reflection upon and exchange of intercultural experiences;
 - e) promote the development of intercultural competence;
 - f) foster learner qualities that are needed in independent language learning; and
 - g) enable various ways of assessment.
- Collaborative efforts and networking to evaluate existing ICT-enhanced programmes for language learning, teaching, and learner and teacher development.

- Development and implementation of joint action research programmes to increase understanding and knowledge required for the establishment of pedagogical frameworks in this field. The acquired knowledge should then be effectively disseminated.

7.2. Needs and measures seen in relation to the promotion of multilingualism and cultural diversity

Although these issues were, in fact, not mentioned by any of the respondents – probably for reasons listed above in 3.1. – it is obvious that these issues should be addressed at a higher awareness level in HE language education, particularly as regards the mobility experiences of both students and staff, as well as future labour contexts. In practice, the measures taken should include what is suggested above about the promotion and delivery of LWULT programmes in co-operation between European institutions. Systematic briefing and debriefing approaches should also be developed and adopted, and growth of intercultural competence should be integrated in all HE education, but particularly in language education, as an across-the-curriculum concept.

7.3. Needs and measures seen in relation to the provision of language learning to students with special educational needs

The potential offered by ICT for students with special educational needs is currently not used in a systematic way across HE institutions. Special attention should be paid to these student groups and to the development of appropriate hardware and software solutions for language learning and teaching. In most cases, these students have the same language requirements for their university degrees than other students, and institutions should make special efforts to accommodate their special needs in the degree curricula and in language teaching.

8. Examples of good practice

8.1. Language Technology Programme and networked Graduate School

A new 10-40 ECTS credit programme in language technology instruction was launched by the Centre for Applied Language Studies of the University of Jyväskylä at the beginning of the autumn term of 2001. This programme is based on a comprehensive approach to ICT-enhanced language teaching and learning, combining theory and practice in the field. It is also closely tied with the national network (KIT) which connects a great number of university departments involved in language teaching, as well as IT departments for technical support. In the summer of 2001 the Finnish Ministry of Education established a new Graduate School in the field of language technology, which will operate within this network, and offer both contact and network-based education in the field. More information is available at <http://www.solki.jyu.fi> .

8.2. Joint projects to develop learning materials

Kieliverkko – Language Net – Språknät is a web-based digital learning environment set up by four Finnish university language centres (Turku University, Helsinki University and School of Business and Economics, Tampere University) and the Hypermedia Laboratory of Tampere University. It includes Swedish and English materials for Finnish university students.

(<http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/kielikeskus/kv/index.html>)

KIVA – network-based language teaching materials for polytechnics is a development project involving seven Finnish polytechnics. The production teams set up in the project have produced materials (using WebCT as the platform) in English (technical, business, IT, culture and literature), Swedish (technical), German (training for outgoing students), and Finnish as a foreign language (advanced level). (web page under construction)

8.3. Institutional projects

The Multilingual Language Portfolio Project : Portfolios as tools for language learners in developing their multiple language resources as part of their professional expertise is an institutional project of Oulu University Language Centre. It was started in spring 2000, and at present involves English, German, Spanish, Swedish, and Finnish language teachers of the centre. The project is a collaborative effort between teachers and students. The special focus area is to develop teaching and learning practices that utilise the multilingual aspect of working life and society, and to use language portfolios as one tool for this development.

(<http://cc oulu.fi/~langcent/pofo/Welcome.htm>)

Language Compass is an institutional development project of Jyväskylä University Language Centre, representing the third cycle (started in 2000) in its departmental action research. The aims are to provide tailored guidance in designing and implementing ICT-enhanced modules with a jointly constructed pedagogical framework for discipline-based language instruction. Particular attention is given to designing language learning tasks for NLEs. The departmental action research was started in 1993 and its overall aim is to promote and develop skills needed in independent language learning. (<http://www.jyu.fi/kielikeskus> - project page under construction).

8.4. Tools and support systems

Xercise Engine is a set of editor tools designed to create Internet-based language exercises by both language teachers and learners. The XE and the exercises can be used and edited with any computer via a Web browser. . The XE editor and the exercises are interactive Java-applets, which respond immediately to the user's mouseclicks There are basically four basic exercise types to choose from: Fill in the blank, Hangman, Matching pairs, and Multiple choice. (<http://www.ruthvilmi.net/hut/XE/Demo/info.htm>)

Tavataan taas! –johdantokurssi Suomeen ja suomen kieleen (Introduction to Finland and the Finnish Language) serves as an example of the new Finnish as a Second Language programmes. It is mainly aimed at foreigners who plan to live in Finland temporarily or for a

longer period of time and need information about the country, but also at any persons interested in the language and in Finland. The short introductory course provides an abundance of links to pages introducing Finnish society and culture, both in English for beginners and in Finnish for advanced learners. (Web page under construction : <http://donnerwetter.kielikeskus.helsinki.fi/FinnishForForeigners/> .

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