



Network project for the decentralised and centralised dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

## **Report on the outcomes of the 1st TNP3-D dissemination conference**

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With the advent of globalisation, successful communication across linguistic and cultural barriers is more important than ever. Foreign language and intercultural skills are needed to communicate in a professional context or when studying or working abroad, and when travelling for business or pleasure. The question is, then, which foreign language and intercultural skills are needed, and how it can be ensured that everyone who needs to do so has the opportunity to develop these skills.

At the conference, the results of the Thematic Network Project (TNP) were presented to a wider audience – representatives of educational institutions, employers in various professions, graduates, and students.

The aim of the conference was to discuss the TNP outcomes and to strengthen the dialogue and collaboration between the universities and their stakeholders, the ultimate result being that the HE language provision is geared to meet the needs of the labour market in the widest sense. This applies to language specialists as well as all other professions that need a foreign language component – to name but a few examples, engineers working abroad, medical doctors treating foreign language patients, people working in import / export businesses, etc.

### *The Nordic Region & Baltic States*

The countries of the Nordic Region and Baltic States are all relatively small countries in Europe, and they each have one of the less widely used and taught languages as their national language. As a consequence, there is a strong need for foreign language and intercultural skills in order for these countries to be active members of the international community and stay competitive in the global market place.

The conference attracted altogether 34 participants.

## Outcomes

Below follows the outcomes of the small group discussions in the form of updated recommendations as well as the general conclusions drawn by the *rapporteur* at the end of the conference:

### *1. Skills and competences required in the language industries and in the language-related Professions*

The small group focused on the topics below; the outcomes do not seem to deviate noticeably from the recommendations of TNP3, SP1:

#### *Linguistic, textual and communicative skills – i.e. professional competences*

The group recommends an increased focus on the importance of mother tongue proficiency: grammar, spelling, and cohesion as basic mistakes are often transferred from source language to target language. Increased general awareness is needed in areas such as:

- Communication
- Language proficiency
- Genres and textual analyses
- Review skills.

#### *Personal competences*

Representatives from the world of work strongly recommended that a specific set of personal competences must be highlighted in training programmes:

- Extrovert personalities are needed;
- Ability to work under pressure & meet deadlines;
- Project management skills;
- Ability to work in cross-disciplinary teams.

#### *Collaboration between H.E. institutions and the labour market*

- Teachers must possess an updated knowledge of market conditions in the language professions.
- Internships would generally benefit students and heighten their understanding of the conditions of working life in the language professions. The following topics are still issues to be discussed among the stakeholders: The length of the internship, the quality of the internship, and the question of whether or not the internship is an integrated part of the HE programme.

## *2. Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour markets*

The small group focused on the following topics without necessarily reaching a final conclusion to all issues raised:

- Do graduates really need competence in several languages? Some stakeholder representatives would say that English is enough, whereas others would disagree with this. The answer to this question obviously depends on who one asks, i.e. the business or organisation in question.
- Labour market needs and the fashions and trends of the young generations do not necessarily coincide. At the moment it is e.g. trendy to learn Spanish in some countries, but this is not the foreign language most required on the labour market. Is it at all possible – or desirable - to align the needs and trends?
- How can students be motivated to learn foreign languages? Suggestions were made to a) include it in job advertisements that other FLs in addition to English are a particular merit in recruitment; b) offer incentives; c) make sure that the content of FL teaching has social relevance i.e. a real-life connection that is attractive and makes sense to students. Again, it is the employers that are to include the skills as an asset and offer incentives. Some will do it, others not. On the university side, adequate pedagogical training for FL teachers is needed.
- Mobility alone does not guarantee the learning of local languages, because most teaching for exchange students is done through English. Co-operation between Erasmus partners in the form of e.g. including local language learning as a requirement or at least as a fully acknowledged credit in the personal study plan/learning contract of the mobile student might motivate some students.
- What are the implications for companies that their employees do not have FL competence? There might well be market losses and other serious consequences. The reports already available on this issue were not discussed.
- How could suitable pressure groups be identified to influence decision-makers and HEIs? Students are a very powerful pressure group, but there ought to be good strategies through which they could become more attracted to demanding relevant FL studies; enterprises and organisations are also possible pressure groups, and increased consultation might help.

## *3. Consultation and Collaboration between universities and other sectors of education*

The small group discussed the following issues:

- Vocational training
- Immigrant languages
- Co-operation between the secondary and tertiary levels of the education systems
- Further issues

#### *Vocational training*

Links to vocational training and education need to be stressed; examples of good practice should be identified.

In Finland students at upper secondary level can take an additional year for a combination of general and professional training. These students later go to polytechnics, not to universities. There are English-speaking programmes in vocational training. The same applies e.g. to the ship-building industry in Estonia (Tartu). In Sweden only English is offered in most vocational training; a second FL is very rare. A trend in Sweden is that pensioners, very often teachers, sign up for language courses at university.

As trade unions have a very strong position in the Nordic countries, it would seem sensible to communicate and cooperate with them when designing FL courses.

#### *Immigrant languages*

As a result of globalisation, immigration should also be an issue, especially the status of immigrant languages. They should be seen as a resource to society. Is this resource recognised and how can it be exploited? This issue has not previously been addressed in TNP3/TNP3-D.

#### *Co-operation between the secondary and tertiary levels of the education systems*

There seems to be little cooperation between the secondary and tertiary levels. In-service teacher training is one important field, which should be seen not only as important for the individual teacher but for the whole of society. One problem is that different actors have different interests. Developing a system of mentorships would benefit all actors.

#### *Further issues*

- There is a strong tradition for formal grammar teaching in FL. How can it be ensured that all FL programmes focus on learning outcomes and the competence profiles of graduates?

- What do we mean when we say that we know a FL? There are different needs for different job profiles.

**The main results and conclusions from the conference may be summarised in the following points:**

- In general, the labour markets in the Nordic and Baltic countries are characterised by sustained economic growth and high employment rates and even bottleneck problems in some areas. In some of the countries there is an unmet demand for high-quality language specialists. Language specialists are faced with increasing demands for competences, also for competences other than language skills and competences, e.g. ICT, knowledge-sharing abilities, expertise in corporate communication, project management and other complementary skills.
- It is necessary to work with curriculum revision and restructuring of language specialist programmes (T&I programmes) to make sure that these continue to meet the demands from the labour market.
- The Nordic and Baltic region is relatively 'well-off' when it comes to language skills in the European context due to being small, traditionally outward-oriented countries. However, this should not lead to complacency.
- Language study programmes are faced with dropping student numbers everywhere in Europe. This also applies in the Nordic countries, but not in the Baltic countries, yet. It is an issue for concern, in some countries it is becoming critical.
- There exists a discrepancy between the rhetoric of multilingualism and lifelong learning, i.e. the mother tongue+two recommendation, and the situation on the ground in many countries. Education policies do not live up to the principles expressed in for example the European Commission's *New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*. Member countries' efforts in this field are not impressive. The increasing advance of English at the expense of other languages is still concerning. In effect, the Bologna-process, with all its positive aspects, at the same time tends to contribute to an 'English is (almost) enough' situation. It is still a major challenge to translate awareness of the problems of lacking language skills into education systems.
- And it is still a major challenge to make employers place the necessary emphasis on language skills in the recruitment situation. Languages tend to be pushed back, despite the fact that they are very often asked for in job advertisements.

- Dissemination is basically a question of continued awareness-raising about the pertinent issues of curriculum reform and collaboration between universities and non-university stakeholders. In addition, dissemination efforts must be translated into strategies, based on hard facts, for putting pressure on decision-makers at especially national and university level. This is necessary in order to ensure that the necessary changes in education policies are implemented in order to promote the multilingual agenda.

Original reports from the small group discussions by Birgitte Norlyk, Syddansk Universitet, DK; Anne Räsänen, Jyväskylän yliopisto, FI, and Anita Malmqvist, Umeå Universitet, SE.

Conference rapporteur: Ole Helmersen, Copenhagen Business School, DK.

Conference host & conference report: Karen M. Lauridsen, Handelshøjskolen, Aarhus Universitet, DK 29 May 2007

