

**Professional development and collaboration
with the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria**

*Laura Ambrosio, FSL Professor,
Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)*

I spent part of my 2017 university professional leave as a guest researcher with the team of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria. My participation in this partnership between Canada and Europe received support from the University of Ottawa, through the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI), and I enjoyed the warm collaboration of the ECML team – administrators, support staff, and trainees.

A key element of this experience and of my learning journey was my being immersed in the cultural diversity of a team composed of members from several European countries. Their differences converged towards a common objective: the sharing of knowledge and know-how specific to the construction of cohesive, linguistically and culturally diverse environments. Every day, I was part of a dynamic working environment, at the heart of the European reality. This allowed me to reflect on the challenges of European countries seeking to reinforce social cohesion and valorize the many languages on their respective territories. I was also able to take advantage of, and contribute to, the resources of the “Learning path: holistic approaches to learners development” program. I will now set out the context of this enriching and interesting experience.

Through the “Languages at the Heart of Learning” program (2016–2019), ECML fosters study and collaboration with researchers who develop, in partnership with other teams, various educational paths for learners, according to an approach promoting independence, personal development, and social-emotional skills. These paths not only further the cognitive learning of languages, but also the intercultural competencies essential for professional and personal activity.

More specifically, one of ECML’s objectives for 2016–2019 is to enhance the resource platform for the “Learning pathways: holistic approaches to learners development” program. This project builds on learning environments and classroom activities aimed at developing critical thinking and self-reflection on learning by helping learners self-assess their goals, motivation, and the underlying emotional, as well as social and cultural factors associated with their own short- and long-term educational aims.

Part of my own pedagogical approach – a project in line with the “student experience” component of the University of Ottawa’s Vision for 2020 – consists in integrating community-based learning into my course load (i.e., French as a Second Language and Second Language Teaching). This aspect is of particular importance in language teaching theory, mostly with respect to the motivation of learners and representation of their identity as students and partners in the second-language communities in which they choose to take part.

As I was able to see during my stay in Graz, one of the main objectives of language teaching research in Canada and in Europe is to uncover links between learning and evaluation in order to achieve greater social cohesion, including through institutional policies and everyday practices.

In this context, my research and collaboration were aligned both with the contexts and fields targeted by the ECML and with the orientations of the University of Ottawa and OLBI.

The common goal of several current research in language teaching and assessment is to reflect on the linguistic and social requirements for training and integration – or integration and training – according to the priorities and circumstances of the various countries in relation to the goals of equity, citizenship and social inclusion, through formal and non-formal learning, with the “learner” at the heart of any initiative.

In the very special current context of migration, the different institutional levels either have put in place or are developing various initiatives. However, these are not uniform, do not have the same priority and are not perceived according to the same urgency or on the basis of the same needs from one level to the other, witness the various international organizations involved (ALTE¹, LAMI², CoE³, LASIG⁴). Effective solutions are not always known or made visible, and sometimes programs that could bridge learning and integration pathways remain less well known (see, for example, the proposed resources on the ECML⁵ platform, the Council of Europe’s European Labeling 6, or the SIRIUS Network).

With this in mind, during my stay in Graz I contributed to putting together a preliminary questionnaire on the development, sharing and publication of teaching resources that provide tools for teachers, along with coaching proposals to facilitate independent learning. This reflection was rooted in community-based learning models similar to those used at the University of Ottawa. It was linked to programs and frameworks proposed by ECML – for example, the Framework for Pluralistic Approaches (CARAP) – in language-learning environments with a view to integration and formal and non-formal education, beyond the traditional classroom.

The central objective of this questionnaire is to recognize and stimulate, on the basis of what is already in place, initiatives for the development of comprehensive and integrative approaches to the learners’ learning path. The objective of the questionnaire is to collect data that could:

- underpin the reflection of an expert working group;
- create links with existing research and initiatives; and
- help develop projects and resources feeding into the practice of trainers and mediators of language teaching with respect to the policies drawn up by the Council of Europe and the initiatives promoted by ECML.

In order to reach such objectives, the questionnaire targets various categories of classroom respondents, mediators, trainers, volunteers and practitioners, as well as policy-makers and researchers, since challenges exist at various institutional levels. The questionnaire should make it possible to gather information on:

- learning and integration paths based on various learner profiles;
- learner and teacher coaching, experience and motivation; and
- other factors determined by existing policies and organizational structures.

The questions asked take stock of different ways of defining “autonomy” in the learning process, as well as of learning approaches and strategies, be they recent or well established, in the psychology of language teaching. These concepts are based on values and competencies that actualize the learners’ cognitive, emotional and sociocultural potential.

Collaboration with other colleagues who are interested in the same themes, in Canada or in Europe, will make it possible to further this reflection. The objective is to look at what is already being done and at what can be proposed, based on a comparison of the data that can be collected through the questionnaire, for example, and the further questions that may flow from it.

-
- i. <http://events.cambridgeenglish.org/alte2017-test/perch/resources/book-of-abstractsfinal-v5-2.pdf>
 - ii <http://events.cambridgeenglish.org/alte-2017/programme.php>
 - iii <http://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants>
 - iv Language Autonomy Special Interest Group Conference: <http://lasig.iatefl.org/local-conferences.html>
 - v <http://www.ecml.at/>
 - vi http://ec.europa.eu/education/initiatives/language-label_fr
 - vii <http://www.sirius-migrationeducation.org/>