

To get to know each other leads to better mutual understanding (Gulliver)

Interactive teaching/learning of intercultural competence

Project description

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1. CONTEXT

In Europe today, the mastery of intercultural competence is an indisputable asset and can no longer be dissociated from effective teaching/ learning of communicative competence in languages.

Most language learning/teaching textbooks and methods include materials designed to introduce learners to the culture and civilisation of the country where the language is spoken. These documents often address traditional issues and topics which awaken little or no interest with learners and restrict the learning of intercultural competence to the comparison of the native language and culture with that of the new language studied.

However, nowadays the idea of intercultural competence within Europe should not be restricted to simply knowing the culture and civilisation of the country of the target language. The language studied should rather be used as a vehicle for discovering the cultural wealth of a number of other European countries and for creating better mutual knowledge and understanding.

Against this backdrop the present project takes up the main challenge of today's Europe as formulated in the title of the second medium-term programme: "Language education for social cohesion in a multicultural and multilingual context."

While the project is an extension of previous work by the Council of Europe (such as "All different, all equal") it opens up a new dimension to the issues raised by the projects conducted by the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz during the first medium-term programme.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

General aims

The general aims of the project are as follows:

- to provide young people learning modern languages with intercultural competences that enable them to get to know and understand one another better and prepare them to live and work in a multilingual and multicultural society;
- to facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competences through interactive communication using modern IT resources;
- to provide teachers and learners alike with genuine tools for teaching/learning intercultural competence.

Specific aims

The specific aims of the project are as follows:

- to create a network of language classes (English/French/German/Spanish) in secondary education (first and second levels) chosen by the participants of the 33 member states prior to the central workshop;
- to invite the pupils of these language classes to suggest topics they are interested in and which they would like to discuss at length subsequently with their peers from other countries. At the central workshop the suggestions put forward by the pupils will be sorted according to three topic areas: y e s t e r d a y (our traditions, customs and habits), t o d a y (our joys and fears) and t o m o r r o w (our dreams and projects for our personal and professional life in the Europe of tomorrow);
- to create and subsequently update a web site where pupils from the selected classes can discuss the topics chosen;
- to encourage teachers and learners to take an active part in the Internet-based exchange forum throughout the project and in the development of subsequent contacts;
- to use the responses / reactions and comments obtained to devise tools for the promotion of intercultural competence within the context of modern language teaching/learning, both for guided learning at school and for self-learning.

3. EXPECTED OUTCOME

Phase I

Process:

- Process launch:
 - Recruiting participants for the central workshop
 - Selecting the language classes
 - Drawing up lists of topics
 - Creating the web site.
- Collating the statements/responses/reactions on the web site.
- Working on the selected responses/statements/reactions.

Products:

A CD-Rom complete with booklet containing selected responses aimed at teachers and learners of English, French, German and Spanish as modern languages.

Phase II

Process:

- Project group work (co-ordination team + 5-6 members chosen among the participants in the central workshop),
- Methodological elaboration of tools for teaching/learning intercultural competence.

Product:

Brochure, complete with tools, for teachers and learners of languages as well as for textbook and programme designers.

4. ACTION PLAN

Phase I

February 2004 to October 2005

Gather the genuine statements made by learners on the selected topics.

2004

13-14 February

Preparatory meeting for the central workshop. Meeting of the coordination team to:

- establish means of contacting the future participants in the central workshop selected and designated by the national authorities;
- define the tasks to be carried out by the future participants prior to the central workshop;
- discuss the structure of the web site and the school network;
- draw up the schedule for the four days of the central workshop.

March to June

The participants designated by the national authorities will:

- *select one (or 2-3) language class(es) (French/English/German or Spanish as foreign languages) at secondary level at their own school or at another school whose pupils would be willing to contribute to the project;*
- *invite those pupils to suggest the topics they would like to discuss subsequently with adolescents from other countries;*
- *draw up tentative lists of these topics.*

The co-ordination team will:

- *contact the designated participants and ensure that the work to be carried out ahead of the central workshop runs smoothly.*

16-19 June

Central workshop of four days (one participant per member state designated by the national authorities).

Four-day workshop to:

- discuss the teaching/learning of intercultural competence at the schools of the countries concerned;
- draw up the list of language classes to be involved in the project;
- decide how the web site will be used;
- draw up the list of topics and decide how they are to be structured on the web site;
- identify the tools that teachers and learners need most for teaching/learning intercultural competence;
- choose six members in addition to the project team – these will be future spokespersons for three networks organised around the three main topic areas (two people per area, each of whom will be responsible for two languages).

Profile of participants:

Secondary school teachers of English, French, German or Spanish as a foreign language (first or second level) interested in teaching intercultural competence, capable of working in French or English, and willing to contribute over the entire duration of the project. To a large extent the project's success depends on the balanced representation of the four languages mentioned above.

Ideally the designated participants should have at least five to ten years' professional experience. They should have been involved in past national or international co-operation projects, and be sufficiently proficient in the use of the Internet so as to be able to use the project's forum on the web site and possibly moderate it.

June to October

The project team is to:

- set up the web site and draw up the topics according to organising principles;
- communicate the details of the web site to the selected schools.

October to February (2005)

The project team is to:

- collate the responses on the web site;
- remain constantly in contact with everyone involved in the project.

2005

18-19 February

Network meeting (coordination team + 6 network spokespersons) to:

- evaluate the initial statements/responses/reactions obtained;
- identify the problems involved in operating the web site;
- make the necessary corrections to the list of topics;
- draw up evaluation criteria for the statements/responses/reactions.

February to June

Project group work follow up aimed at gathering the response/reaction on the forum of the web site.

1-2 July

Meeting of the project group to:

- evaluate and select the response/reaction;
- decide the contents of the CD-Rom.

Phase II

October to October (2006)

Using the statements / reactions / responses obtained, to devise tools for teaching and learning intercultural competence.

14-15 October

Network meeting to:

- present the results of Phase I;
- decide on how to disseminate the products of Phase I;
- draw up the methodology for producing the tools for teaching/learning intercultural competence based on the statements obtained.

October to January (2006)

The project group is to work on the tools.

2006

February to June

Preparation of the final versions of the tools.

June

Meeting of the project group to:

- finalise the help brochure for teaching intercultural competence;
- improve the tools devised;
- prepare the concept for disseminating the results.

June to October

Publication of the final product from the second phase of the project.

5. LANGUAGES

The working languages of the project are French and English. Simultaneous interpretation between the two languages will be provided at the plenary sessions of the central workshop in June 2004.

Not only is a balanced representation of the teachers of the four languages mentioned desirable, it is also essential that the teachers of Spanish and German taking part in the central workshop be able to express themselves in French or English.