Cohesion of competences, coherence of principles (CoCoCoP)

Exploring theories and designing materials for teacher education

Project description	*Version 1.0*

Co-ordinator: **Anne-Brit Fenner**, *University of Bergen, Norway*

Project team: **David Newby**, *Karl Franzens University, Graz, Austria*
Péter Rádai, *Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary*
Ruxandra Popovici, *The British Council, Bucharest, Romania*

1. CONTEXT

This project aims to develop three strands which formed the basis of several projects of the first medium-term programme and which represent issues at the cutting edge of modern language teaching: the multi-competence nature of modern language learning; the role and nature of teacher education in mediating these competences; the theories which underlie post-communicative language learning and teaching. The relevance of these issues to the project is as follows:

1. The projects of the 1st medium-tem programme reflect the variety of innovative approaches that have emerged in post-communicative teaching and reflect the broadening of goals which underlie modern language learning. Just as the communicative approach extended the narrow focus on language systems to incorporate communication, so in the post-communicative phase the focus on communication has been extended to incorporate a variety of competences such as socio-cultural competence, intercultural awareness and learning to learn. These additional categories can be seen by comparing the language-based *Threshold Level* with the *Common European Framework*, which has taken on board educational and cultural goals and specifications. Communicative competence has been extended to incorporate a variety of competences.

   For both language teachers and materials designers, these new competences are sometimes seen as being separate from language-based goals, as rivals for the sparse and valuable time available in the language classroom. A question which our project will address is the integration of a variety of goals into language learning and how communicative language competence can act as a springboard to other competences which lie within areas such as social interaction, language awareness, intercultural awareness, learner autonomy, etc.

   In doing this we shall be looking to specific theories of language use and language learning to provide a bridge between various competences.

2. As confirmed by project 1.2.4 of the 1st medium-term programme, teacher education deals with specific goals, methodologies and examples of classroom activities but often does not provide sufficient opportunity to discuss the theories which underlie them. Teachers may therefore lack the ability to critically assess them and develop their own personal sets of principles, which is an essential prerequisite of democratic learning. The result may be that both teachers and their students become victims of methodology and dogma. As a first stage of an ongoing and life-long development, teacher education should therefore provide the opportunity to rethink theoretical concepts - even those which comprise the accepted wisdom of modern language teaching such as communication, autonomy, intercultural awareness.

In order to achieve this aim, however, the form of teacher education has to be examined since innovation in language learning needs to be analysed through dialogic interaction between: learner – learner; learner – teacher; learner – text; native culture – target culture (Project 1.2.6 of the 1st medium-term programme). Establishing these dialogic relationships will also be one of the aims of the project's central workshop and will be reflected in the modes of presentation we shall adopt.

3. In recent years, due to the influence in particular of ICT and various (misguided) interpretations of autonomous learning, there has in some teaching cultures been a downgrading of the role of the teacher in intensive, classroom-based learning. The importance of teachers in a dialogic learning process needs to be stressed but their role also needs to be reconsidered. At the heart of our project is the centrality and importance of school learning and the language classroom.

In accordance with the rationale of the 2nd medium-term programme, the project will take an 'integrated approach to language learning and teaching based on a new educational role for language teachers'.

The starting point will be the following three projects of the 1st medium-term programme of the ECML:

1.2.4   *Mediating between theory and practice* (David Newby)
1.2.6   *Cultural awareness and language awareness based on dialogic interaction with texts in foreign language learning* (Anne-Brit Fenner)
2.1.1   *The Status of language teachers* (Peter Rádai)

In addition the project is linked to the following ECML projects of the 1st medium-term programme: 2.1.2, 2.1.3 and 2.1.4.
It will also explore potential links with "A framework for teacher education" to be developed in the 2nd medium-term programme.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

General aims
- Consider how language-based aims can be integrated into social and educational aims
- develop critical awareness about theories of language learning
- link theory and practice in teacher education and in classroom practice

Specific objectives
- Examination of teacher education curricula in different countries to discover to what extent they include current theoretical aspects of language learning, in particular with regard to language awareness, specific learning theories, learner autonomy and intercultural awareness
- examination of materials commonly used in European classrooms and analysis of their underlying principles
- presentation and discussion of current theories relevant to important aspects of language learning and their consequences for the design of materials
- consideration of how a variety of learning goals & perspectives – linguistic, educational, intercultural etc. – may be harmonised to achieve cohesion of competences
- development of principles relevant to materials design
- compilation, adaptation and production of exemplary materials based on these principles

3. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Process
- obtain an overview of theories and practices inherent in different curricula of language teacher education
- focus on theories and practices which are missing in the above
- develop a critical awareness of theories

Product
A **publication** which

- presents an overview of current theories of language learning
- outlines important principles relating to various competences
- provides samples of materials to support language learning

The publication will target teacher educators and language teachers and will both aim to stimulate discussion of theories and principles and to provide exemplification of practice. It is intended as a resource for in-service and pre-service teacher education courses.

4. ACTION PLAN

2004

27-28 February
Meeting of coordinating team in order to
- prepare documentation
- specify tasks
- organise preparatory stage of project.

February to September

Preparatory stage

Before nomination of participants:
- *prepare documentation to be used as a basis for the participants' collection of materials.*

After nomination of participants:
- *participants will be required to make a collection of theoretical principles which can be found in the curricula of teacher education in their respective countries. The categories used will, to some extent, be based on descriptions in the Common European Framework.*
- *participants will be asked to compile a dossier of materials commonly used in the classrooms in their country.*
- *these principles and materials will provide input for discussions at the following central workshop and will provide a link between theory and practice.*

10-11 September
Planning **meeting** of the coordinating team:
- assessment of preparatory stage and materials
- planning of central workshop

3-6 November
ECML **workshop** where
- principles and materials will be discussed in relation to current theories
- conclusions will be drawn
- common principles will be drawn up to serve as the basis for the following publication
- tasks related to materials production will be assigned

Participants' profile:
Participants must be pre-service teacher educators, preferably with experience in curriculum/syllabus design and/or materials development

It will be a condition of participation that they are willing to
(before the workshop):
- make a collection of theoretical principles which can be found in the curricula of teacher education in their own contexts
- compile a commented dossier of materials which are commonly used in school classrooms in their country and which reflect these principles

during the workshop:
* actively take part in discussions of materials, principles and theories of language learning
* participate in working out relevant principles

after the workshop:
* contribute materials to be used in a publication
* establish a dissemination plan in their own context

November – April (2005)
Materials production stage: production of exemplary materials, to be used in teacher education and language classrooms, which illustrate how principles and theories influence language learning tasks and activities.
Coordinators and participants will prepare their contribution to the publication. This will be supported by ongoing web-based discussion.

2005

May
Planning **meeting** of the coordinating team to
* assess materials;
* plan the publication.

September
Publication **meeting**;
Selected authors of the publication will meet to discuss their contributions and finalise the publication.

2006

Spring
Project **publication.**

5. LANGUAGES

The working languages of the project are English and German. Participants will be required to be highly competent in speaking and writing in one of these languages.