

“INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN ADULT LANGUAGE EDUCATION” – A FORUM FOR LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER AND ENCOURAGING SYNERGIES AMONG PROJECTS

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Abstract

Set against the backdrop of the Grundtvig Learning Partnership "IPALE", this article aims to highlight the benefits of learning from each other both at institutional level and as individual professionals, involved in Teacher Development and quality management in various educational contexts. Taking a case study approach, the article illustrates how building on networking and synergies can enhance benchmarking opportunities and the effectiveness of project activities. The article also reflects the partners' preoccupation for developing tools and procedures for maximising exchange processes through projects and for enhancing their impact on practice across educational sectors and country borders.

Key-words: adult education, learning partnership, innovation,

Setting the scene

The "IPALE" Project (GRU-09-P-LP-82-B-CZ) is a Grundtvig - "Learning Partnership" among five national quality assurance associations - ACERT from the Czech Republic (coordinator), OPTIMA (Bulgaria), NYESZE (Hungary), PASE (Poland) and QUEST Romania - all of them members of the European Association EAQUALS.



Since each of these partners has member language centres providing adult education, the "IPALE"-partnership can be considered a network of networks covering all the five countries and with links beyond institutional and country borders.

IPALE Partnership at the 1st project meeting in Prague, 2009.

The main project aims were facilitating the development and implementation of innovative practices in adult education and fostering lifelong learning, through the sharing of experience internationally. More specific objectives included:

- enhancing mobility opportunities of adult learners through effective integration of practice-oriented language learning and cross-cultural competencies;
- benchmarking quality assurance approaches for higher professional standards in adult education institutions;
- effective implementation of language competence descriptors for adult learners' objective self-evaluation, to enhance their performance in foreign language communication;
- effective management of Quality Control Associations as non-profit legal entities;
- awareness-raising – among adult learners and teachers/trainers, the general public and decision makers - regarding the role of quality assurance systems in the field of language education.

In order to achieve these objectives, the partners have set out to create a platform for cooperation, exchanging institutional experience and sharing best practice, disseminating locally and internationally through their networks, creating synergies and putting into practice effective approaches to adult language education, for better career opportunities and international mobility.

Personalising the approach

To make the most of each project meeting and to capitalise on the strengths of each project partner, a Needs Analysis and feasibility study were carried out in the first project stage. This was then followed by a more detailed survey of partner needs and interests in relation to specific strengths identified in the other partners.

Thus, before the 2nd meeting in Bucharest, the Romanian team initiated such an exercise, in order to prioritise activities and to facilitate the sharing of relevant expertise according to expressions of interest for certain thematic areas.

The participants were provided with a template in tabular form (see Appendix), where each of them had to enter:

- a) what they were interested in finding out from each of the other partners

- b) what their team had 'on offer', what they considered to be their strength and were prepared to share with the partners.

The final fine-tuning of the programme was based on both (a) and (b).

Thus, for instance, in response to partner expectations, QUEST Romania contributed presentations on innovative projects, resulting in on-line tools for more effective teaching and language learning (see EuroEd projects in this volume, Colibaba et al, 2010; Pop, 2010; Mag & Samuila, 2010). QUEST members also shared expertise of implementing self-assessment through the use of the *EAQUALS-ALTE European Language Portfolio*, quality assurance in language education, based on the QUEST system and cooperation with the University of Economics in Bucharest, as well as on outcomes of the ECML "QualiTraining" projects (Muresan, Heyworth, Mateva & Rose, 2007).



The Czech partner ("IPALE" project coordinator) illustrated CEFR-based assessment of Czech language proficiency (see ACERT contribution in this volume, ACERT, 2010), while Bulgarian participants shared their experience of introducing the ELP in a university context, as well as the benefits for a university department of becoming a member of the national quality assurance system OPTIMA.



Hungarian and Polish partners contributed presentations on quality assurance and the role of NGOs in decision-making in civil society, while the teacher trainers among the IPALE representatives (both QUEST members and university teachers from the Academy of Economic Studies) participated in Teacher Development round-table discussions.

The above images speak for themselves, as illustrations of the collegiate sharing of experience during the 2nd project meeting, jointly held with the annual conference of QUEST Romania and the Department of Business English and German, the Academy of Economic Studies (Bucharest 2010).

Each stage took the partnership further in refining and diversifying the process of learning from each other. For instance, the presentations and round-table discussions were not only opportunities for gathering insights into innovative processes as potential sources of inspiration, but also helped the IPALE-community of professionals become better aware of each partner's area(s) of expertise. This resulted in detailed programme planning for further project stages for even more relevant activities in real-life contexts.



Thus, the following project meeting in Budapest included practical observations of language classes at a NYESZE member school, as well as full TT/TD-sessions on topics of interest for all the partners and hands-on experience of IT-implementation in FL-classes.

In addition, IPALE included examples of benchmarking in event-organisation terms, e.g. after experiencing the added value of a joint project meeting and conference in Bucharest, the Polish partner decided to create a similar opportunity, linking the 4th project meeting to the annual international PASE conference in Warsaw.

Specific Outcomes during the First Project Year

All project meetings and events (co)organised by IPALE project partners included (a) practical activities (workshops, teacher development sessions, language teaching with partners observing the class, hands-on use of ICT for adult education) and (b) sharing of experience and best practice in round-table format, all these meant to enhance the competencies of educators of adult language learners, so as to set off a cascading process, with adult learners as final beneficiaries.

Concrete activities included:

- Presentations, workshops and round-table discussions on Teacher Development (for EN, DE, LWULT), addressing e.g. how to best link language teaching to the world of work (e.g. "Teachers' role in FL and business communication education & LLL in the knowledge-based society" is just one in a series of presentations contributed by QUEST members; "The use of language competencies when working", presentation contributed by NYESZE representatives);
- Project-based presentations and demonstrations of innovative practices in language education to enhance student motivation and communicative competence, e.g. using the "MacMillan Campus", Web 2.0;
- Sharing experience gathered through other LLL-projects and using their outcomes as source of inspiration for the IPALE-Partnership, developing learner autonomy and enhancing the teachers' competence and confidence in using ICT, various eLearning platforms created through EU projects, and blended learning to facilitate effective student learning;
- Initiating surveys on thematic threads that were particularly relevant for Quality Assurance and coping with change in a globalised world.



The project has, thus, become a framework for integrating several key competencies, with a special focus on: communication in foreign languages (KC2), Cultural awareness and expression (KC8), improving ICT skills in teachers and teacher trainer (KC4), as well as Learning to learn (KC5).

The Intercultural Component

The cultural and linguistic diversity dimensions were present throughout the IPALE activities and materials. All the Teacher Development sessions and materials integrated activities for awareness-raising to the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe, promoting a deeper understanding of cultural specificity and the need to adjust to various contexts. Building on synergies with other projects, QUEST representatives illustrated how to integrate

these dimensions in language teaching and learning, creating opportunities for learners to become familiar with these issues; e.g. presentations at the 2nd project meeting, linked to the international QUEST-IPALE conference, as well as presentations at the 3rd project meeting in Budapest included the intercultural dimension of communication, highlighting also its importance for career development, for transnational communication and the business world.

Presentations by one of the QUEST representatives focused on the importance of mentoring for inter-generational learning, while other contributions - both by QUEST and by NYESZE - highlighted the importance of new forms of ICT and social network services for lifelong learning and inter-generational communication. E.g. during the 3rd IPALE Project meeting in Budapest, NYESZE representatives illustrated possibilities of using Internet tools in ELT as well as in creating the final product of the IPALE Project. These included worldwide known social network services such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as personal teacher blogs used as a meeting point for students and parents (representing all ages or ethnic origin). The activities inviting adult learners to reflect on relevant issues (such as equality between genders, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, etc.) were an illustration of how they can be used in the teaching of foreign languages in Europe. This helped the participants to devise strategies and produce educational materials to help teachers engage adult learners in the process of studying foreign languages within an intercultural framework.

In addition, cultural components in the spare time contributed to the partners' better understanding of each other's culture, thus enriching the IPALE project experience and contributing to even closer networking on multiple themes

By way of a conclusion

IPALE activities and outcomes have contributed to the dissemination of the project ideas and products in all the project countries and beyond, reaching a wide international audience among the international lifelong learning community. Moreover, IPALE outcomes and achievement generated ideas leading to new possible projects and networks, e.g. a new Grundtvig partnership involving universities in two of the project countries, plus also another country ("TAMSEF", 2010-2012).

IPALE training ideas and materials have been piloted in various educational contexts, with positive feedback from the participants, which has set off a cascading process to the benefit of adult language learners as final beneficiaries of innovative approaches introduced

and experimented through this learning partnership. The synergies with professionals and organisations beyond the project participants has been beneficial for all, students, teachers, institutions, as well as the wider professional networks in the project countries and beyond.

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Grundtvig Learning Partnership "Innovative Practices in Adult Language Education" - Partners' Expectations from each other & Contribution Proposals for the 2nd Project Event, 21-22 May 2010

	ALL	AJSCR	NYESZE	OPTIMA	PASE	QUEST
AJSCR	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •
NYESZE	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •
OPTIMA	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •
PASE	• • •	• • •	• • •	• •	• • •	• • •
QUEST	• •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •	• • •

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Note: on white background: partners' expectations from each other; on blue background: each partner's contribution / offer to contribute to the 2nd project meeting; update re contributions to CD-ROM

	ALL	AJSCR	NYESZE	OPTIMA	PASE	QUEST
AJSCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re adult language learning & teaching - existence of "state language schools" in your country (countries); i.e. do they still operate, what is their relevance and reputation for ADULT language education; are their quality standards monitored by the state authorities, are any of them your association members etc.? • Re quality assurance strand: Teaching RO, PL, HU, BG as FL – what is the status quo re methods of teaching, teaching materials, recognised exams, applying CEFR descriptors, qualification of teachers, etc. i.e. can the QA standards compare to languages taught internationally? 	<p>COORDINATING the IPALE PROJECT</p> <p>Presentation of the DVD illustrating CEFR levels for Czech as an FL (presentation included in the volume with conference proceedings, on CD-ROM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategy for achieving extensive membership • the constructive working relations with Hungarian Government Offices • development of the innovative language teaching methodology introduced at the 1st Project meeting • members' experience of dealing with big corporate clients in times of crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementation of European Language Portfolio into curriculum design & testing ADULT/ CORPORATE CLIENTELE language courses • marketing at national level in terms of attracting NEW members and applying QA procedures • members' experience of dealing with big corporate clients in times of crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • members' experience of dealing with big corporate clients in times of crisis • involvement promoting PL as a FL, co-operation other institutions involved in teaching Polish as a Foreign language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re adult assessment Language Portfolio - how do you manage to use it so successfully with your adult learners? Can you share practical steps in incorporating it to your corporate courses? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to share expertise in projects QUEST members coordinated or were partners in • to share experience with members' experience of dealing with big corporate clients in times of crisis
NYESZE	<p>To discuss and share ideas and experience on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broadening the inclusion of stakeholders, focusing on the educational and social responsibility of language professionals, • how to facilitate the exchange of expertise among: (a) the state sector and the private sector, (b) city environment – rural environment, (c) educationalists – adults / parents / state education authorities; (d) professionals with international experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how CEFR descriptors are used in self-assessment • to share experience in developing descriptors for teaching and testing Czech as a foreign language 	<p>preparing to share ideas on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy for achieving extensive membership (attracting new members) • the constructive working relations with Hungarian Government Offices (e.g. which Government Offices and the essence of the cooperation) • Strong financial background (sources of support) • Projects participation (2 ppt-presentations included in the volume with conference proceedings, on CD-ROM) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise in conducting training sessions for inspectors, teachers, academic managers and admin staff in the field of quality language services. • How did OPTIMA member schools develop their own systems of language descriptors which constitute the basis of their syllabus design and testing procedures? • Marketing : joint advertising, commissioning a market research for the association, press conferences and other media events, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marketing, public relations, member recruitment procedures • representation of civil rights (anti-VAT campaign) • practicalities behind the teacher training courses – needs analyses, course content adjustment, costs, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the legal procedure and state regulations (acts, decrees, ministerial regulations, etc.) re accreditation of adult education with special regard to language teaching institutions and programmes • the advantages and/or disadvantages (if there are any) the right and duties of a state accredited institution • the procedure – technical and practical aspects - of the accreditation process • the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, the human & financial resources, management of the projects

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OPTIMA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share experience in providing their finances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expertise in encouraging adult learners' self-confidence and use CEFR descriptors Share experience in developing descriptors for teaching and testing Czech as a foreign language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy for achieving extensive membership (attracting new members) To elaborate on the constructive working relations with Hungarian Government Offices (e.g. which Government Offices and the essence of the cooperation) Strong financial background (sources of support) Projects participation 	Presentations on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELP implementation at the Technical Univ. Sofia; QA system at the Free Univ. Varna, full member of OPTIMA TT/TD through CELTA courses (AVO-Bell Sofia) (all 3 presentations included in the volume with conference proceedings, on CD-ROM) 	Sharing expertise in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> selling teacher training courses across the country as part of life-long education attracting moral and financial support for various PASE causes (for example during the campaign against VAT on educational courses) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are interested in how QUEST obtained accreditation from the Ministry of Education and Research: the application procedure and the inspection system (if any) What are the benefits of being a member of FocusEd (?) and ELAN (?) Sharing expertise in applying for and managing national and international projects
PASE	Share experience, knowledge and strategies on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attracting new members & keeping the current ones PR and marketing - tools and strategies; involving accredited members in PR processes Financing projects and varied initiatives the accredited association members training seminars and workshops (e.g. topics, length, finances / sponsors; frequency, locations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informing the public sector (?) about the teaching systems and approaches, international exams, new teaching trends Opinion-making processes on solutions concerning language education in Czech Republic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide more information about the discussion forums with professional and decision makers as well as exhibitions organized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involving the language departments of the two biggest private universities in the country into the OPTIMA membership Cooperation with the associate members – e.g. The British Council, Goethe Institute, Sofia and the publishers (benefits, conditions for the membership, offer, etc) 	TT/TD organised by PASE in Poland Presentation on the "Teachers' Hats" TT-programme (included in the volume with conference proceedings, on CD-ROM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do a presentation / training / WS on EU projects preparation and coord. Do a training / WS to show a sample of TT/TD Provide more information on the European Label for Languages for the ECML Project "Quality Assurance and Self-assessment for Schools and Teachers" (benefits, promotion, project outcomes)
QUEST	<p>IPALE Project-related issues: What concrete outcomes do we expect this project to have? In what form, so as to make them visible? How do we intend to disseminate them? Prep for the first interim report / summer 2010.</p> <p>Inter-association cooperation & EAQUALS: How to cooperate better - e.g. in terms of participation in & implementation of EAQUALS TD and QA SIP-materials / projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to share expertise re producing the CEFR-based video for Czech as a national AJSCR-project 	the topics proposed for presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of the OPTIMA system of language descriptors and its implementation into curriculum design & testing joint marketing coherence of approach at national level in terms of attracting members and applying QA procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PASE members' experience of dealing with big corporate clients in times of crisis marketing TT/TD courses involvement in national campaigns - getting one's voice heard promoting PL as an FL, co-operation with univ. and other institutes on this 	<p>Presentations / WSs on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELP implementation /TD WS QualiTraining - case studies re its implementation on-line resources in adult education for greater learner autonomy (e.g. MacMillan c.) particip. in round-table on QA national systems & EAQUALS European projects prep., coord, outcomes & evaluation (presentations included in the conference volume/CD-ROM)

Note: on white background: partners' expectations from each other; on blue background: each partner's contribution / offer to contribute to the 2nd project meeting; update re contributions/CD-ROM (3.05.2011)