



First National NELLIP Workshop

“Promoting quality in the development of linguistic skills in connection with the European Language Label”

Report

**Florence
24 January 2014**



On Friday 24 January 2014, the first National NELLIP Workshop “*Promoting quality in the development of linguistic skills in connection with the European Language Label*” took place in Florence, in the framework of the NELLIP project, the Network of European Language Labelled Initiatives, funded by the European Commission - Lifelong Learning Programme – KA2. The National Workshop was organized by Pixel in cooperation with the Italian National Agencies, in charge of the Lifelong Learning and Erasmus + Programmes, represented by Natalia Guido and Claudia Villante (Isfol) and Lorenza Venturi (Indire).

1. Introduction

The Workshop started with an opening address by **Elisabetta Delle Donne**, Pixel President, welcomed and thanked all the guests for their participation. The purpose of the workshop was immediately described: to offer language teaching experts and providers the opportunity to improve the quality of their language learning initiatives on the basis of the criteria used to award the European Language Label. For this reason, the participants reflected the profile of the target groups the workshop was addressed to: public authorities, National Agencies, cultural institutes and associations (65%), Universities (25%) and high schools (10%).

Elisabetta Delle Donne briefly described the programme of the workshop, focusing to the transnational part to be carried out in cooperation with Omnia, the Joint Authority of Education in Espoo Region, Finnish partner of the NELLIP project. The workshop has been organized according to the following programme:

- Introduction
- Brief introduction to ISFOL survey focusing on languages’ key competences
- Discussion on the topic: “Languages’ key competences”
- Work team, analysis of projects and development of operative plans
- Presentation of the results to the participants attending the Finnish National Workshop
- Discussion on the topic: “Linguistic skills as strategic skills”
- Workshop Evaluation

Elisabetta Delle Donne introduced the NELLIP project, making reference to its objectives and results (Database of awarded projects, Case Studies, Best Practices, National and Transnational Reports, Guidelines).

2. Introduction to ISFOL survey focusing on languages’ key competences

Claudia Villante (Isfol) described the objectives of the ongoing survey carried out by Isfol in order to understand the 8 key competences. The survey is being realized thanks to the involvement of several language experts and analyzed the key competences to be developed in the learning and teaching processes, according to the guidelines and the suggestions produced in the framework of the Erasmus + Programme. One of the key competences – the multilingualism – was further discussed during the workshop.

Natalia Guido (Isfol) underlined how the language key competences have acquired a strategic role in several fields of application: employability, labour market, international mobility. The role of these competences has been strongly stressed by the European Commission, whose aims at improving the knowledge of foreign



languages according to quality criteria. The same criteria which are used to award the European Language Label.

3. Discussion on the topic: “Languages’ key competences”

Lorenza Venturi opened the first session of the workshop.

All the participants presented themselves and the main activities developed by the institutions they represent, focusing on those projects which were awarded the European Language Label: **Natalia Guido** (Isfol National Agency for LLP and Erasmus +), **Claudia Villante** (Isfol National Agency for LLP and Erasmus +), **Lorenza Venturi** (Indire National Agency for LLP and Erasmus +), **Maria Norton** (British Council), **Hartmut Retzlaff** (Goethe-Institute), **Sophie Stellini** (French Embassy), **Nadia Gatto** and **Elisa Bianchi** (ICON), **Mario Paiano** (Centro Machiavelli), **Silvia Minardi** (Lend), **Fulvio Pellegrini** (IRS Europa), **Chiara Cappa** (Linguistic High School “L. Respighi” of Piacenza), **Mike Hammersley** (University of Bologna), **Monica Lupetti** (University of Pisa), **Eugenia Liosatou** (University “Cà Foscari” of Venezia), **Andrea Villarini** (University of di Siena), **Dario Manna** (Province of Rome), **Laura Boselli** (European Commission), **Elisabetta Delle Donne** and **Antonio Giordano** (Pixel).

Natalia Guido (Isfol) proposed to start from a common and shared basis represented by the awareness about the strategic role covered today by foreign languages. For this reason, Lorenza Venturi (Indire) asked every participant to quote those key words related to quality issues in language teaching and learning processes.

According to Natalia Guido (Isfol) and Hartmut Retzlaff (Goethe Institute), languages represent a key competence and a significant skill to be spent on the labour market. However, according to Maria Norton (British Council), in order to make this skill as expendable as possible, it is necessary to improve language teaching processes, through the involvement of all the main actors responsible for education. Sophie Stellini (French Embassy) explained the necessity to focus on the CLIL approach and the international mobility and to offer accessible and high quality multilingual services. In addition to this, Nadia Gatto (ICON) and Mario Paiano (Centro Machiavelli) underlined other main elements in language training and learning: the personalization and localization of the educational materials in relation to the training needs and the geographical context, and the combination between theory and practice. According to Silvia Minardi (Lend) it is crucial to firmly focus on in-service lifelong education, while Chiara Cappa (“L. Respighi” High School of Piacenza) stressed the necessity to understand the educational tools to be used in order to motivate students, teachers and the entire education system. Mike Hammersley (University of Bologna) confirmed the necessity to have a shared certification framework for language skills. According to Monica Lupetti (University of Pisa) and Claudia Villante (Isfol), it is useful to promote language intercomprehension and to offer didactic opportunities in non formal contexts. Eugenia Liosatou (University “Cà Foscari” of Venezia) underlined the historical and cultural background lying behind the languages: this connection promotes a general interest towards different cultures. According to Andrea Villarini (University for Foreigners of Siena), it is necessary to focus on teachers’ training and on the construction of a multilingual society. Dario Manna (Province of Rome) explained that the first step to undertake is a clear analysis of those skills required on the labour market, while Elisabetta Delle Donne (Pixel) stated that it is important to fully exploit the existing resources and to spread information about the learning opportunities offered at European level. Finally Laura Boselli (European Commission) reported the



necessity to do some lobbying at political level, in order to promote Europe as an opportunity and mobility as an attitude.

Workshop participants' drew up a list compounded by those key words related to quality issues in language teaching and learning processes:

- 1) Languages as key competences for employment
- 2) Languages as a qualifying element for European citizenship and for employment
- 3) Europe as an opportunity and mobility as an attitude
- 4) Languages and culture. Promotion of interculturalism
- 5) Stakeholder engagement at all levels
- 6) Information on existing opportunities. Exploitation of existing sources
- 7) Lobbying at political level
- 8) Lifelong learning
- 9) Accessible, guaranteed, high quality, multilingual services. Value for money.
- 10) Certification, transparency and transferability of competences (including those acquired in an informal setting).
- 11) Motivating users
- 12) Correspondence to the needs of the end users
- 13) Tailoring to context
- 14) Innovative methodologies
- 15) Integration of theory and practice
- 16) Teacher training, continuing professional development

4. Work team, analysis of projects and development of operative plans

Once identified the key elements which are essential to ensure quality in language teaching and learning, workshop participants identified the most critical issues related to the implementation of language projects and to the participation in the European Language Label. For example, Mario Paiano (Centro Machiavelli) pointed out how difficult it is staying behind evolving technologies in the framework of language projects. Several solutions emerged. Andrea Villarini (University for Foreigners of Siena) , for example, suggested the introduction of a plan for adapting technologies to a changeable reality. On the other hand, according to Sophie Stellini (Embassy of France) it is necessary to focus on reliable technologies in order to be sure about the expected results.

The analysis of common criticalities in the planning and management of language initiatives will be further discussed during the upcoming workshops .

5. Presentation of the results to the participants attending the Finnish National Workshop

The transnational discussion represented the added value of the workshop. Thanks to a Skype connection, Italian participants in the workshop shared their results with the participants in the Finnish NELLIP Workshop, which was organised by Ominia, the Joint Authority of Education in Espoo Region. Among its activities, Ominia is involved in several language projects on national and international level. Main focus has been the development of online methods and materials for language learning in vocational training. These methods enable students' individual choices for language and culture learning according to their interests and vocational orientation.



Italian participants choose a rapporteur, Maria Norton (British Council), who shared with the Finnish colleagues the key words found during the work team.

From their side, Finnish participants focused on specific projects which awarded the European Language Label. The analysis of those projects let the participants to the following results:

- the success of a language project depends on immaterial elements (motivation) and material elements (economic resources)
- with reference to the immaterial level, it is necessary to motivate all the main actors involved in the teaching / learning processes: politicians can be motivated by doing some lobbying focusing on the strategic role of education ; teachers can be motivated by rewarding the extra work which is necessary to carry out successful learning projects; parents can be motivated by involving them directly and actively in their children' education. The result is the the main beneficiaries of those processes are the students
- with reference to the material level, the lack of resources due to the economic crisis represents the main obstacle teachers and trainers found recently on their way. The transnational discussion with their Italian colleagues is intended to find possible solutions to this criticality.

Italian participants found several convergent points between their results and those found by the Finnish group, in particular the necessity to motivate training actors and to do some lobbying at political level.

After the presentations of the results achieved during the work team, the answers and questions' sessions was opened.

According to the data available in the NELLIP Transnational Report (http://nellip.pixel-online.org/files/transnational_reports/Transnational%20Report%20NELLIP.pdf), the highest number of projects awarding the European Language Label has been realized in Italy. Finnish partners asked their Italian colleagues the reason to explain a similar result and how they face the lack of economic resources to be addressed to language projects. According to Italian participants in the workshop, it is essential to be creative in defining a language project, whose objectives and results have to be spread around in order to obtain further economic resources.

Italian participants asked their Finnish colleagues about the role foreign languages cover in their teaching experience. Finnish teachers explained how English language is well diffused and represents an essential step to enter the labour market. In Finland, English language is taken for grant, even if Finnish pupils start studying English later than Italian pupils (when they are 9). On the contrary, the main difficulty is pushing pupils to study other foreign languages. In addition, Finnish participants stated that, thanks to the workshop experience, they have a clearer idea about the elements to care of while creating language projects.

6. Discussion on the topic: "Linguistic skills as strategic skills"

The last part of the workshop focused on the topic: "linguistic skills as strategic skills". According to the participants, a language does not only represent a mean of communication, but it is a living and trasversal competence with several social and cultural implications. For this reason, it is essential to:

- motivate all the actors involved in the teaching processes
- define shared standard for quality assessment and linguistic skills' certification (the Common European Framework of Reference usually allowed to contradictory evaluations)
- precisely define the educational needs of the learners and the best tools to satisfy them
- push the teachers to upgrade their linguistic and teaching skills
- do some lobbying activity towards the politics

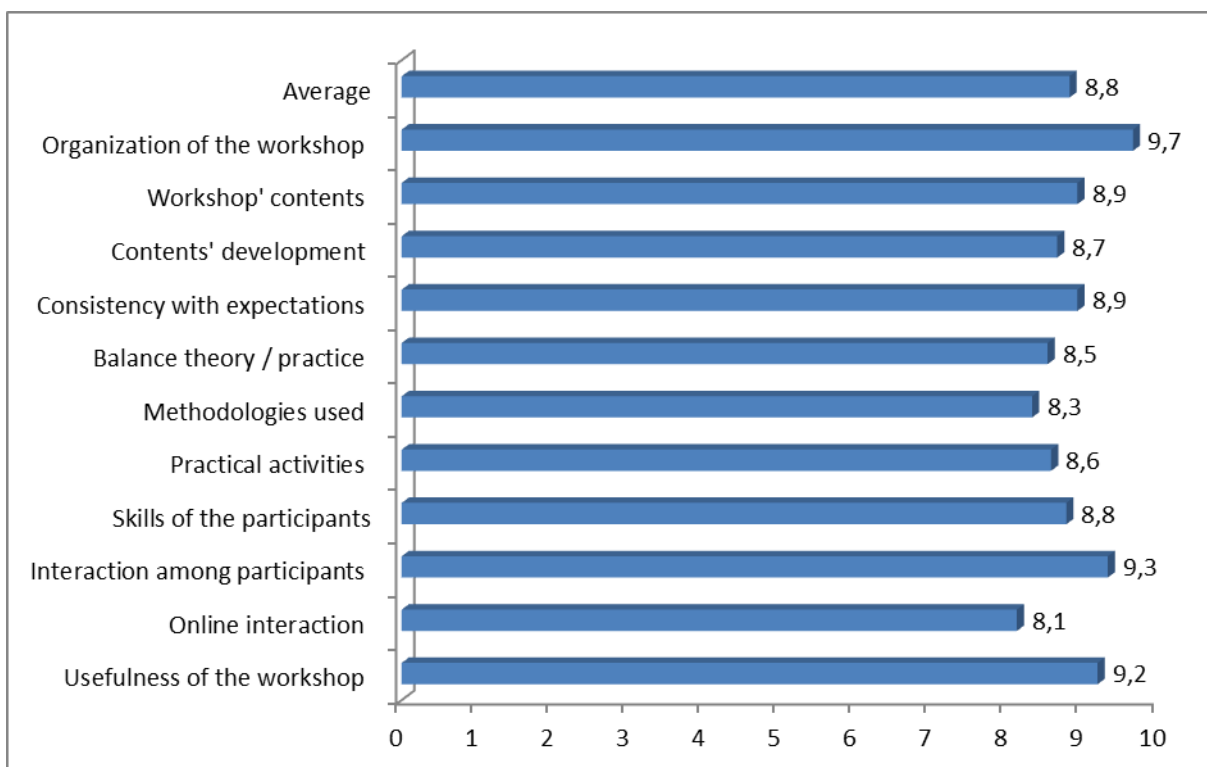
- focus on mobility programmes, which are very helpful in acquiring language skills

Thanks to these points, it is possible to learn, or better to “adopt” , a foreign language and its related culture.

7. Workshop Evaluation

The results achieved in the framework of the practical sessions were jointly discussed. Workshop participants were provided with an Official Certificate, attesting their participation in the Workshop and their active involvement in the NELLIP Network activities.

All the filled in an evaluation questionnaire, from which emerged a positive feedback about the workshop. The results of the workshop evaluation are explained below:



Workshop participants highly appreciated the organization of the workshop (9.7 / 10) and the contents developed (8.9 / 10). *“I liked the cooperative atmosphere among the participants. During the discussion, we had the possibility to discuss about interesting topics and to develop creative plan for the improvement of language projects and initiatives”*: this is one of the comments which synthetizes participants’ feedback about the workshop. This feedback is confirmed by the high score obtained by the interatction among participants (9.3 / 10). Contents were appropriate (9.2 / 10), consistent with the initial expectations (8.9 / 10) and well developed (8.7).

The result is an excellent average mark of 8.8 / 10.