# Quality, Innovation and Networking in Language Learning

## Guidelines for the School Education Sector

**based on experience derived from projects
that were awarded the European Language Label**

# Contents

# 1. The European Language Label - general information

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# 1.1 What is the European Language Label?

### Aims

The European Language Label (ELL) is an award that encourages new initiatives in the field of language teaching and learning by rewarding them, by spreading the knowledge of their existence, and thereby promoting good practice.

The Label is open to all types of language education and training projects, regardless of the age of students or the methods used, its main focus being to promote innovation. By supporting innovative projects at local and national level the Label seeks to raise standards in language teaching across Europe.

Each year, the Label is awarded to the most innovative language learning projects in each country. It is coordinated by the European Commission, but managed by the individual Member States through their National Agencies.

### Criteria

Projects are selected for award according to criteria agreed at European level. Annual priorities are also identified at European and also at national level. The European Criteria are:

- Initiatives should be **comprehensive** in their approach. Every element of the language project should ensure that the needs of the students are identified and met
- Initiatives should provide **added value** in their national context; this means a tangible improvement in the teaching or learning of languages, either in terms of quantity or quality
- Initiatives should **motivate** students and teachers to improve their language skills
- Initiatives should be **original** and **creative;** they should introduce previously unknown approaches to language learning, but also make sure they are appropriate for the students concerned
- Initiatives should have a **European emphasis:** they should take account of Europe's linguistic diversity and make use of this - for example, by liaising with contacts across national borders
- Initiatives should be **transferable**; they should potentially be a source of inspiration for other language initiatives in different countries.

## Priorities

Every year the European Commission proposes specific priorities for the European Language Label award. These priorities refer to the political and strategic rationale for promoting and improving language teaching and learning in Europe.

For the 2012-2013 Campaign, the priorities defined by the European Commission were:

- language learning based on the new technologies
- multilingual classrooms

In accordance with the priorities selected by the European Commission, national agencies may identify more specific national priorities that are relevant for the improvement of language learning in their respective countries.

## Timing

Label campaigns are organized by the national agencies in the Member States. A public call for applications for the award is announced at national level. The Label campaigns provide information about the objectives of the Label, the current European and national priorities, the selection criteria, and the procedure for applying. Label campaigns are organized in different periods of the year in the various member states, so the deadlines for submitting applications also vary.

## Selection procedure

In each member state, the European Language Label is awarded by an evaluation committee or jury. The task of the committee is to select those projects that best meet the requirements and the European priorities.

## Prizes

In all participating European countries the Label is awarded in the form of the official European Language Label certificate. The winners are also entitled to use the European Language Label logo in their communications or publications.  In some countries, prizes are also awarded by national sponsors.

## Further information

Further information about the European Language Label is available at the following websites:

- **European Commission**
  The European Language Label official web site
  http://ec.europa.eu/languages/european-language-label/index_en.htm;

- **National Agencies**
  The National Agencies in charge of the European Language Label:
  http://nellip.pixel-online.org/EUL_national_agencies.php.

# 1.2 Impact of the European Language Label

The European Language Label is relevant to the school education sector for the following reasons:

**It provides official and European recognition of the project's quality:** the aim of the European Language Label is to identify high quality and innovative projects in language teaching and learning at a European level, and to make them known.

Examples of projects that have won the European Language Label:

"Gut in Tandem" is a project coordinated by Dietrich-Heise-Schule. It aims at promoting and developing intercultural and social competences, as well as motivation to learn and a sense of responsibility by taking over the role of the teacher. By means of communicative and intercultural application of "learning through teaching", schoolchildren have an opportunity for daily international encounters. Tandem learning enables durable social contacts to be established, and methods of learning and using languages are assimilated and become transparent.

According to the coordinating school, the award of the European Language Label to the project was recognition of the quality of the project itself and rewarded the teachers involved by placing their work in an international context, and giving them opportunities to present it in local and Europe wide contexts.
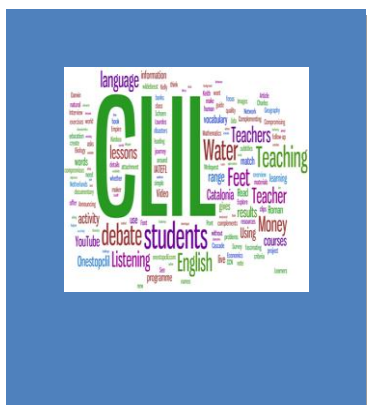
The aim of the "Nouvelle approche en classe de maths: le français au service de la géométrie euclidienne" project is to communicate the main Euclidean theorems in a non conventional way in order to stimulate the active participation of students. The project allows students to acquire those specific abilities thanks to the help of a software package and the use of the French language. In addition, the project encourages teamwork and synergy between teachers of different subjects.

According to the coordinating school, obtaining official recognition in the form of the European Language Label confirmed the quality of the work carried out by students and teachers, who were convinced of the value of the CLIL approach, one of the European Commission's priorities in language teaching and learning.

**The European Language Label ensures greater visibility for language projects and the coordinating institutions:** A reason to apply for the European Language Label is to raise the profile of the project and the school coordinating it. If projects

are presented at national and international language education events they will gain greater visibility. Such events are often organised in cooperation with the relevant National Agency or with the European Commission. Projects also become better known because of being included in the European database of quality projects, available in the Multilingualism section of the European Commission's website. In addition, after receiving the European Language Label, several projects receive acknowledgement and publicity in their local or national media.

**The European Language Label increases the motivation of staff involved in the project: o**btaining European recognition may help teachers to gain greater awareness of their own role. The initiatives that a school engages in depend for their success on motivated staff, and due recognition for the time and the energy they invest in these activities is essential. The European Language Label may have an important impact on teachers' motivation: those who took part in the project receive official recognition; those who have not taken part in the project may start to ask for information about the results and impact of the project. The award of the European Language Label may have the same effect on students and parents, who understand the value of such an award and may be motivated to participate.

Example

The main objective of the "Between the lines" project was to develop basic skills in reading - reading literacy (reading, use and interpretation of information in writing, reflection and evaluation of this information) and foreign languages (English). It also involved using the skills and knowledge acquired in class to solve real problems, to communicate with students from different cultural environments.

The European Language Label increased the motivation of the staff involved, because the project was promoted in the school at teachers' meetings (as an example of good practice), and some of the staff decided to start an e-Twinning project. Other teachers were interested in making video scenarios to increase students' interest in reading, as well as starting a 'bookstore', where students had to present Romanian books they had read by producing brochures, flyers, and a newspaper. Also the school developed its reputation for experience and expertise in European projects, which weighed heavily in the establishment of successful new partnerships and obtaining new European grants.

**The European Language Label contributes to greater project sustainability:** there are various ways in which the European Language Label may contribute to greater sustainability. For example, a 'labelled' project may have better opportunities for follow-up in subsequent activities or projects. Indeed, some of the projects, led to successful applications for further funding under the Leonardo da Vinci 'Transfer of Innovation' programme. The European Language Label may also have a revitalising effect on the coordinating institution, contributing to its acceptance and consolidation, motivating teachers, creating the conditions for a further exploitation of the project. Thirdly, obtaining the Label may help the coordinating institution to identify further funding to continue the activity. Finally, by rewarding good practice and highlighting quality, the European Language Label encourages the maintenance and further development of projects.

Examples:

The "Cucina d'Inferno / Hell's Kitchen" project was innovative in teaching languages to students through a vocational skill. The pupils were treated as professional trainees while in the kitchen. Italian was the language of instruction in the kitchen and the pupils' understanding and use of the language was recorded by NVQ assessors – making use of naturally occurring evidence rather than relying on simulations in the classroom.

Receiving the Label encouraged *Cucina d'Inferno's* promoters to submit an application for a new project based on the *Cucina d'Inferno* initiative: the project coordinator believes that the official recognition of project quality provided by the Label award, contributed to the approval of the new project.

The goal of the "Professor Dr. BC" project has always been to make preschool children from South Jutland-Schleswig interested in the neighbouring languages, Danish and German. The project aimed to show that it can be fun to learn another language, and that it does not have to be difficult because there are so many similarities between Danish and German. The project's target group includes not only the children but also the participating teachers, who have found that the project gives them inspiration to work with languages.

The European Language Label had an important impact on the project because the award helped to attract new participants and obtain further funding for its continuation.

**The European Language Label contributes to the sharing of good practice:** some project promoters have said that they had the opportunity to share the good practice exemplified in their initiative with other colleagues. These opportunities for

sharing occurred mainly at events organized in relation with the European Language Label, for example the Language Label award ceremony.

Examples:

The "DeutschMobil" project aims to provide a dynamic, interesting and attractive image of the German language, in order to increase the number of French students choosing it as second foreign language after English. From 2001, 553.700 students have been reached by this initiative. The results are evident: a 50% increase in enrolments in German classes after the "DeutschMobil" cars had passed through. The project was selected as Best Practice by the French National Agency "Europe-Education-Formation".

The *DeutschMobil* project is based on the idea of international mobility. This aspect was especially highlighted by the European Language Label. The award of the Label led to the creation of further national and transnational partnerships, which have guaranteed the sustainability of the project. The *DeutschMobil* project approach is now being used by other organisations.

The "Tomorrow's World" project has various objectives. From a linguistic point of view, it aims to develop students' communicative skills, motivating them to interact and to use the foreign language to present their own concepts. From a didactic point of view, it aims to develop scientific knowledge and literacy. From a civic point of view, the project aims to make students more responsible and sensitize them to European values.

According to the project coordinator, the European Language Label led to an opportunity to share this experience with promoters of other awarded projects, which was positive for those involved.

# 2. Managing the quality of Language Learning Initiatives

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# 2.1 Introduction to quality issues

## *What is 'quality'?*

'Quality' is an overused term often associated with fast moving consumer goods or with services such as a stay at a hotel, or a meal in a restaurant. But what does 'quality' actually mean? How can it be measured, and what are the implications for language education projects? These are some of the questions addressed in this first sub-section, which will go on to look at how the criteria used for selecting projects to receive the European Language Label relate to definitions of quality.

A simple definition offered by Oakland[1] is that quality simply means meeting the requirements of the customer. A less simple definition is proposed by Feigenbaum[2] "Quality is a customer determination based upon a customer's actual experience with a product or service, measured against his or her requirements - stated or unstated, conscious or merely sensed". So quality is closely related to 'customer satisfaction': customers are the ones who decide what services and goods are high quality and low quality, not the providers of a service or the makers of a product.

A favourite cartoon reproduced in Oakland's book demonstrates this point:



| As proposed by the project sponsor. | As specified in the project request. | As designed by the senior analyst. |
| As produced by the programmers. | As installed at the user's site. | What the user wanted. |
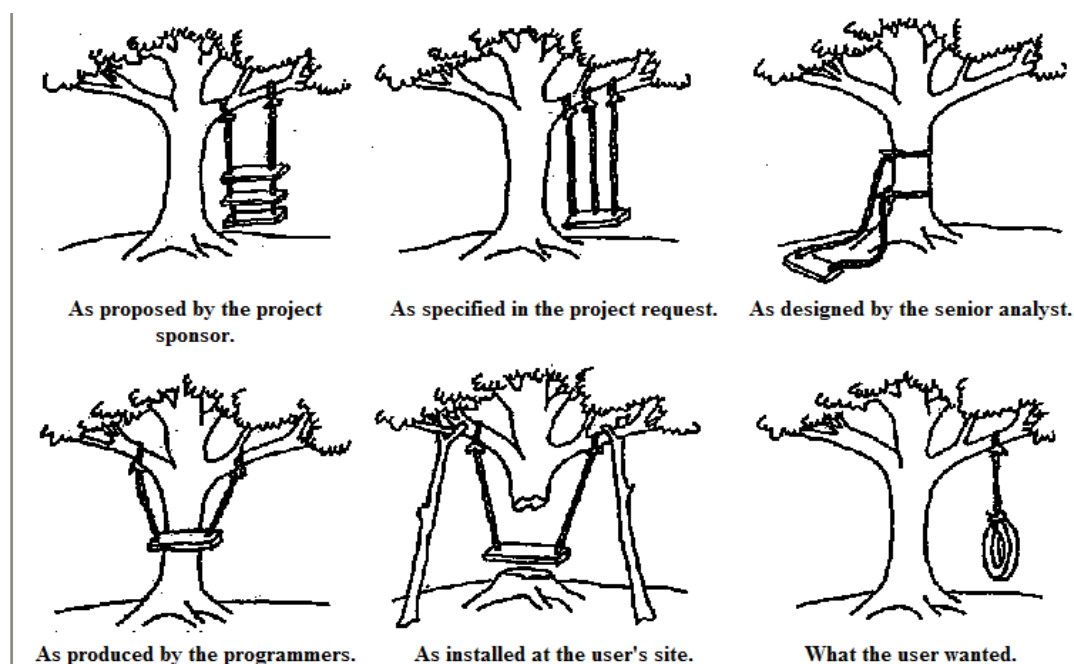
The moral of this story is that it is possible to put a lot of effort and investment into a product or service without getting anywhere near providing the customer with what he or she wants and would consider good quality.

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[1] Oakland, John. 1991. *Total Quality Management*. Butterworth-Heinemann
[2] Feigenbaum, Armand. 1961. *Total Quality Control*. New York: McGraw-Hill

## Who is the 'customer' in language education projects?

It is important to consider who the customers or beneficiaries of language projects are. As with education and training in general, there may be several beneficiaries, but primarily the concern is for the learner, in this case the language learner. Behind this group of 'customers' there is often another group or individual. In the case of students at school there are the parents who directly or indirectly (through their taxes) pay for their children's education. In adult education and corporate training, employers or government agencies may be paying for the service. Finally, there are stakeholders such as the ministry of education, authorities and school principals to consider as indirect 'customers' and certainly as stakeholders.
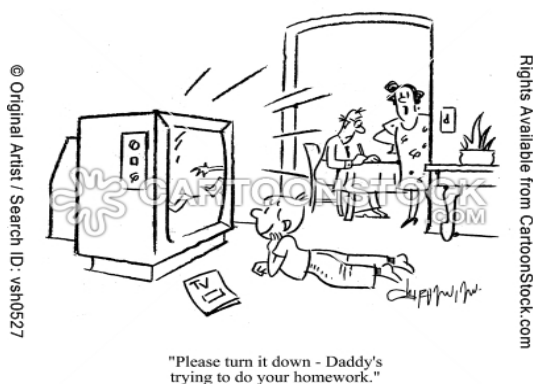


"Please turn it down - Daddy's trying to do your homework."

The implication is that somehow educational provision, including language education projects, need to meet or preferably exceed the expectations of all these types of customer. This is not easy as the expectations of different groups may contradict each other. The classic example is the difference of view between young students at school wanting to be entertained and 'active' while they learn and that of their parents, whose concern is for exam results, grammatical knowledge and proof of a certain level of language proficiency.

Of course, especially in a service as complex as education, it may not be that easy for customers to define or know exactly what they want. They are more likely to recognize what they don't want.


## How do the criteria used in selecting projects to be awarded the ELL fit in with quality concepts?

The European Language Label criteria were discussed in section 1. These require projects selected for award to:
- **be comprehensive** i.e. every element of the language project should ensure that the needs of the students are identified and met
- **motivate** students and teachers to improve their language skills
- be **original** and **creative**
- provide **added value** in their national context
- have a **European emphasis**
- be a **source of inspiration** for other language initiatives in different countries

Only the first two of these criteria directly relate to the primary customer, the language learner. Other criteria are more to do with national and European concerns and to less easily assessed features such as originality, creativity and transferability.

## What aspects of a language project need to be considered when assessing its quality?

This sub-section looks at language education projects from the point of view of quality, with reference to examples from some projects based in institutions in the UK and Germany.

Quality is not related to a single aspect of a project but to <u>all</u> aspects and factors. Each element is interdependent with others, so if there is a weak link in the 'quality chain' the overall quality will be affected. Below are some of the main aspects to be considered.

### a) Who are the learners who are expected to benefit from the project?

Language learners are the primary customers and their needs and their view of what will be a beneficial outcome for them and a good project experience are most important. If relevant and possible, other customer groups, such as parents, or in vocational education, employers, should also be listened to. In many cases learners are consulted before the project is fully planned. Those designing the project must really know the students well and understand their learning and motivational needs.

Examples: In the Primary Community Language Tasters project (UK 2010) the target group was young primary school children aged 5 to 7 in schools in Hampshire in southern England.
In Reading together those who are expected to benefit from the on-going project are children of Italian-speaking parents.

### b) What are the origins and goal of the project? What inspired the initiative? What language learning need is it responding to?

Heyworth[3] points out that 'Projects are different from ordinary work. They are intended to change things', or, we could add, at least test things out to see if they need changing. Certainly, even a two hour class project should be a change from customary classroom work. The type of project being discussed here needs to be carried out for a good educational reason, not, for example, simply because it is seen as a way of making life more interesting for teachers, or in order to win an ELL award!

### c) What are the specific aims and target outcomes of the project during and after its 'lifetime'?

The learning or experiential outcomes at or after the end of the project need to be carefully thought through to ensure that they are achievable by and useful to the learners, and they also need to be measurable so that they can be properly evaluated. In addition a good quality project will have intermediate aims that can also be evaluated. For example, in Eurofest (UK 2009) the project had a specific end point:the organisation of a simulated 'trade fair' in which year 8 secondary school students could 'sell their products' in French or German to local business people and university students, with a prize going to the best presentation.

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[3] Heyworth, Frank. 2002. *A Guide to Project Management.* Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages. See http://www.ecml.at/tabid/277/PublicationID/39/Default.aspx

**d) Are the necessary financial resources available to run a project with these aims?**

This is usually a crunch question: some projects require very little extra money, for example if they involve students working in a different way during class time. But a project that goes beyond day-to-day school based learning usually requires extra funding. There is no point in continuing with planning a project unless the project organiser is sure that the necessary money can be found, either within the institutional budget, by applying to a local agency or sponsor, from parents and students themselves, or in some cases from international funds such as those provided by the EU Commission under its Lifelong Learning programme.

**e) How is the project designed, and who is/was involved in that?**

The design includes various key aspects related to the goal:

- **Length**: projects usually have a fixed duration, or at least a deadline at which a review will take place before continuation. A project may be short term or long term, fixed term or open-ended

- **Participants**: at one extreme they may involve a single class of students or group of teachers (in Primary Language Podcasting it was teachers in primary schools in the northeast of England), and at the other extreme several institutions may be involved;

- **Methods and processes**: these again will depend on the project's goals and intended outcomes; some projects simply involve a different way of learning (for example, a mixture of class work and on-line learning); in others, students use their language skills in a community activity, or on visits to another country. Still others are mainly about producing new resources to help teachers or students. Each goal requires a different approach to project management and quality management; thus, for example, Fashion International involved teachers in different schools developing new topical teaching materials for French focusing on fashion, trying these out themselves, then sharing them with teachers at other schools, and using materials created by other teachers with their own students. Finally, students themselves had to produce original work in groups – their 'magazines' in French.

- **Materials and technological and logistical resources:** these usually depend on the methodology. If innovative uses of information and communication technology (ICT) are important for the project, for example, the availability of the necessary hardware and software has to be guaranteed. If students and their teachers need to travel from one place or country to another, the organisation and booking of the travel need to be thought through.

- **Staff:** the people who will be involved as teachers, or trainers, or materials writers, and what kind of other support they need, are also key factors in project design. The staff need to fully understand and be committed to the project, and some staff should have been involved in the planning of it. They must have a shared philosophy and understanding and be good team workers;

- **Project management:** this is key to the eventual and intrinsic quality of the project. The person or people managing the must be not just committed and interested but also methodical, resourceful when things don't go to plan, good at communicating, and firm when necessary.

### f) How will the progress and success of the project be evaluated, and who will be involved in that?

This needs to be considered right at the beginning. In a way, if the outcomes of the project cannot be evaluated methodically, the project should not go ahead. Those responsible for evaluation should include the students themselves, the project leaders and ideally someone who is not working on the project at all but has the necessary expertise. .

### g) How will communication be handled, and what form will it take?

If a project is to be successful, communication among those involved, both staff and students, has to be efficient and effective. But there also needs to be communication with the outside world in order to keep those who are interested and helping to finance the project informed, to seek ideas from experts outside the project, and to ensure that anyone interested in the project can find out about it, and perhaps be inspired to plan a similar project, or to join in.



Unfortunately, the minister's little joke didn't translate well into Ukrainian.

### *Quality assurance and quality management*

Since the middle of the 20th century terms like 'quality standards', 'quality assurance', 'quality control' and 'quality management' have become part of the vocabulary of management in any field of activity. But what do they mean, and how do they relate to educational projects? The terms all refer to verifying the quality of products, services, or in this case, projects.



Quality control is typically carried out in organizations producing goods or products: someone at a yoghurt factory takes pots of yoghurt at random to test whether they meet the standards established by national or international legislation, by the yoghurt industry itself, and by the producer. Any faults or problems identified will lead to a change in the processes and possibly the withdrawal of thousands of pots of yoghurt. The process is similar with car manufacture, although in this case the vehicles that do not meet agreed standards will be rectified rather than destroyed. With services such as hotels, banks and petrol stations, the quality control may be done by 'mystery customers', people who are employed to check the quality of service while pretending to be normal customers, or may depend on feedback from customers collected through questionnaires or interviews.

Quality assurance procedures are used by companies themselves to ensure that a concern for maintaining and improving quality is built into every part of the production cycle or service delivery. Typically companies will ask 'focus groups' of customers and members of staff questions to identify areas of concern and ideas for improvement. Some organizations employ outside specialists to help with this. In the language education world, for example, EAQUALS offers language institutions the opportunity to be 'accredited' or 'certified' according to EAQUALS standards. Inspectors (or auditors) regularly visit the institutions to check all the aspects covered by EAQUALS' standards, especially the services being offered to students, and to advise on ways of improving quality further.

Many other organizations use ISO (the International Organization for Standardisation) standards to help with quality assurance. Auditors from a certification body are asked to verify whether the quality of products, services or management systems comply with the requirements of the relevant standard. In these cases, the certificates given by outside bodies can be used as a 'quality label'.

In summary, quality management is the set of ongoing procedures that organizations use to maintain and improve quality, including the quality control and quality assurance processes referred to above. Total quality management (the title of Oakland's book, and a concept originally developed by Feigenbaum) involves ensuring that every single employee focuses on quality in their work and contributes ideas, large and small, to help improve quality from the point of view of external customers but also of 'internal customers', the staff themselves.

### *Quality issues in school-based projects*

Having introduced certain concepts and criteria relevant to quality in general, what specific guidelines can be offered for those planning or already involved in language-related projects in primary or secondary schools? Based on the various case studies collected during the Nellip project, there are some simple measures that safeguard and potentially enhance the quality of the project, both in terms of the processes and the outcomes. The example below illustrates several of them.
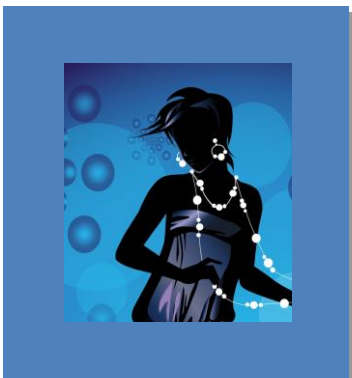
The main aim of Fashion International was to encourage more secondary school children to understand the career relevance of learning foreign languages and to keep going with French in particular. Teachers at five schools in and near Birmingham, UK wanted to help students understand how important languages are as work- and life-skills, and to increase the take-up of French at age 13-14. They were also keen for students to bring in other curriculum areas including art & design (textiles) and ICT to demonstrate the value of languages in conjunction with these, and to pool the experience and enthusiasm of their different schools

The project was officially launched by a fashion industry expert, who highlighted how important language and cultural skills are in fashion. Students were then mixed into multi-school teams to participate in tasks in French describing fashion celebrities, and challenging stereotypes. Then, for six weeks afterwards, students worked through the units and used their learning to produce their own fashion magazines. These were submitted to the expert at the end of the project and prizes were awarded.

The key features that enhanced the quality of the project were the following:

- **Fashion is interesting to teenagers and has international relevance** and several multinational fashion brands are based in the UK as well as outside. It was important to have a focus that ensured that participants used French and understood the relevance of the foreign language to their lives in the real world, including the world of work.

- **A one-year plan made the project manageable** and helped with deadlines: the programme consisted of group planning, followed by a launch event, followed by using specially written teaching modules, and lastly a closing event in the form of a fair. This kind of project structure is more likely to lead to a sense of achievement and a positive impact not just at the end but at regular intervals.

- The fact that each school was represented in the running of the project by at least one teacher **ensured that each school contributed what it had agreed to contribute**. Distributing responsibilities among different teachers and students is more likely to build a good project team and collective effort.

- **Having a launch event and a closing event were important**, as were the interventions of the industry expert. Projects need a clear beginning and target dates for completion of each phase, or of the project as a whole. The closing event was also a kind of evaluation

- **The project manager and industry expert visited each school during the project to maintain momentum** and to provide more insight into the topic and encouragement to continue the work. Ongoing support and guidance throughout the project is essential so that participants can resolve difficulties and 'give of their best'.

## 2.2 Criteria, standard and indicators

There are several significant criteria that can be used to identify a high-quality language project. In fact, these criteria can also be applied to most projects in the training sector in general.

- Project manager: the person in this role needs to be able to use an array of skills during the project.

- Project team: the team must be made up of people with a variety of skills and experience. Success is easier to achieve with proper guidance when the team is working well.

- Project: the scope and timeline of the project are crucial.

- Organization: the organization needs to provide support to both the project manager and the project team. The organisation's management needs to be convinced of the importance of the project from the beginning of the planning phase onwards.

- External environment: external constraints should not affect the project. Back-up plans should be in place in case daily tasks cannot be carried out by the team.

*Source: Tutorialspoints*

Project programmes and the amount of funding available vary a lot in different training sectors. So the project objectives and the tasks related to the expected outcomes should be defined in a way that takes into account the actual budget and the proposed timeframe. There are also other criteria for a successful project: these criteria concern the **outcomes**, **impact** and **beneficiaries** of the project.

**Project outcomes**
The outcomes of the project should correspond to those mentioned in the project application and project plan. The outcomes may take various forms: they may be learning outcomes, learning and teaching materials, new teaching methods etc.

New methods, as well as new training materials, should be piloted with the right target groups and end-users during the project's life time, not after it. The perspective and feedback of end-users should then be taken into account. This will make it possible to obtain enough feedback to make all the necessary modifications to the end product. The testing (or piloting) should always be part of the project activities, and sufficient time should be allowed and enough people should be involved.

Critical thinking is important when analyzing the feedback gained from the piloting activities, since it is only the end-users that can give relevant information about the usefulness of the outcomes. The testing may also flag up opportunities for transferring the outcomes to new sectors or to other languages. The extent of the material produced should more or less correspond to that presented in the project plan: if more material is produced this may increase the impact of the project, but in most cases, the funding available also determines the amount of work that can be done.

**Project impact**

The expected impact of the project should also be estimated during the life of the project. This might sometimes be difficult because the outcomes and results are not yet concrete. However, the impact is always affected by the financial resources available, and will correspond to the input. The clearer the aims and tasks are, the easier it is to estimate the potential impact. In some cases, the impact may be much broader and more effective than estimated at the beginning, as may also be the case with the outcomes; for example, new target groups might be able to exploit the results, which is always a positive outcome for a project. Sometimes the project focuses on a very specific and narrow professional sector, but the impact and the usefulness of the project are greater if the outcomes can easily be transferred to other circumstances or to other training programmes.

**Beneficiaries**

The beneficiaries are a significant factor in a successful project. They should already be taken into consideration in the planning phase and should be strongly represented and carefully considered during the project work. When planning a project, it may be helpful to refer to existing needs analysis such as surveys or statistics regarding the learning objectives and learning needs of the target groups. Interviews and discussion with the teachers and with representative end-users will provide up-to-date information about their current needs.

**Standards**

Project standards may be described as follows[4]: they are the rules and conventions governing the way in which a project will be conducted. They may be driven by organizational practices or by the unique requirements of the project. The project manager should set the standards for the project right from the very beginning. Let us consider some examples.

- **Meeting procedures:** it is good if the project team can meet regularly. By agreeing on the meeting times in advance, the project team makes sure that everyone is available for work on the project on certain dates and times. A joint weekly meeting for a couple of hours greatly helps communication and collaborative work.

- **Documentation and communication:** the project manager should ensure clear communication procedures and make sure that all the relevant material related to the project and to the work process is available to everyone. Naturally, the general rules of the training institution concerning documentation should be followed. It is also good to be prepared for absences during which someone else in the organization might need information related the project. Clear schedules with set milestones will aid the management and the flow of work on the project.

- **Sharing of knowledge:** the project team members should be selected to ensure that they can provide all the expertise and knowledge needed for the project. Different kinds of expertise and work experience may be needed to create a competent project team. Students and end users can also be included in the project team or in the steering committee. The project manager should facilitate the sharing of knowledge among members.

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[4] Adapted from the website Project management.com

- **Problem solving:** the project manager as well as the whole project team should be prepared to deal with problems which may arise during the project. Members of the team may change, objectives may seem too hard to achieve, interaction among team members may not always work out in the best way, the training institution might face financial or organizational changes which have an effect on the project, and so on. However, there should be enough flexibility and openness to face such problems and to find the best solutions.

## Indicators

Indicators can show how well the project is being carried out and how successful the project has been compared to the initial plans. The same indicators that are mentioned in the project proposal and in the project plan should be used to evaluate the project at the end of the project period. There should be a balance between input and output, which means that the resources put into the project should lead to the planned output of the project. The financial inputs should lead to results that correspond to the predefined objectives. The initial "problem" that the project aimed to solve should also be reconsidered: the indicators should show how suitable the solutions identified during the project are. Indicators of change should also be taken into consideration: were there any external factors which had an impact on the project?

There are four possible types of development indicators. Good data and appropriate procedures should be used to assess the project against these indicators:

- **Input indicators** measure the financial, administrative and regulatory resources provided by the government and/or other funding bodies. A link should be established between the resources used and the results achieved in order to assess the efficiency of the actions carried out.

- **Output indicators** measure the immediate and concrete consequences of the steps taken and resources used, for example, the number of training units created, the number of teachers trained, etc.

- **Outcome indicators** measure the results in terms of target group benefits, for example the percentage of students choosing to study a less widely-spoken language.

- **Impact indicators** measure the long-term consequences of the outcomes. They look at the general objectives in terms of national development and in terms of the project's impact on its surroundings and target groups, for example, increasing language proficiency in terms of the number of languages or the level of language skills (Source: Aid Delivery Methods).

Organizations are increasingly being called on by the general public and by those providing funds to account for their achievements in terms of concrete results. To be able to do this, development interventions, projects and programmes need to become more and more "SMART":

**S** **pecific**
Should be clear to people with a basic knowledge of the issue, program or initiative and clearly articulated, well defined and focused.

**M** **easurable**
Should be able to determine the degree to which there is completion or attainment. Using the same (ideally quantifiable) methodology and information, findings should be able to be replicated.

**A** **chievable**
Should be realistic, practical, and attainable within operational constraints dependent upon availability of resources, knowledge, and timeframe.

**R** **elevant**
Should be tied to government priorities and mandate and help or contribute to the bringing about of the desired outcome in the Canadian society, economy or environment.

**T** **ime-bound**
Should have clear deadlines expressed.

In summary, indicators typically show the following aspects of the project activities:

## 1. What?
What are the outcomes and results of the project? What work processes are used to achieve these results?

## 2. How much?
How big and impressive is the change that the project aims for?

## 3. Who?
Who is the target group? Are there direct and indirect target groups? Have these target groups been reached properly?

## 4. Where?
What is the geographical scope that the project is aiming at? Is the project international, national, regional or related only to one specific university or training institution that is running it?

## *Case studies - school-based projects*

Kielitivoli (Language Circus) - Finland

A large network of experts participated in the work. The results of the project were convincing: there are now more options for foreign language learning for all grades in comprehensive schools in the Hämeenlinna region. Also, the description of the language learning pathways has supported equal opportunities for foreign language learning in Hämeenlinna. There has been an increase in the number of foreign language learner groups, and in cooperation between language teachers and other networks. In pre-primary education 12 groups (out of 19) have used the language materials created by the *Kielitivoli* project.

These indicators (the number of languages available to choose from, equal opportunities in language learning, the increase in cooperation between language teachers and other networks, the number of groups using the materials produced by

the project) clearly demonstrate the impact of the *Language Circus* Project. It is orth *noting that this project was also chosen to represent Finland in the 'Multilingualism in Europe* ceremony held in Limassol, Cyprus in September, 2012.

[Teaching Chinese](#) - Finland

The objective of this programme is 'functional bilingualism' supported by providing teaching of both Finnish and Mandarin Chinese. The project has served as a model for the creation and development of other language learning programmes, such as a Finnish-Spanish programme, and the methods used can easily be transferred to other training programmes and sectors. The impact of the project has thus been much wider than was expected when planning the project. Networking between schools has been supported and strengthened by the way the project team has helped to transfer the project outcomes, experiences and models.

[A Whole School Approach to the Teaching and Learning of Spanish](#) – Ireland

The aim of this project was to integrate Spanish language learning into the school curriculum at all levels. The programme is now incorporated into the school. It can be taught by any class teacher and will be updated on a yearly basis. Motivation and enthusiasm for the Spanish language, and the cultural and linguistic awareness of staff and pupils, has been enhanced. This very clearly shows the impact on the direct target group, i.e. the students, who are as a result given more opportunities to study Spanish at this school, where there are now sufficient teachers teaching the language.

# 2.3 Methods and procedures

## Introduction

Several well documented and tested methods of teaching languages can be considered when deciding what methodology to apply in a given project. Gangnon[5], for example, gives a clear brief overview of language teaching methodologies in Methodologies in Foreign Languages Teaching.

Teachers choose methods in order to respond to various factors, such as political priorities, current research, students' results and so on. In different language teaching contexts different methodologies are useful for different purposes. The case studies we have selected feature mainly the **communicative approach**, a method where students work only in the target language in class and small mistakes are not corrected. In this method grammar work is not emphasized: instead, the focus is on explaining and interacting in the target language and getting students to use it. The method is a means of achieving student-centred teaching, where communication in small groups is a common way of working. The **total physical response (TPR)** method is also among those used in the projects evaluated. In TPR language learning is connected to actual physical movement following instructions in the target language ('stand up', 'catch this', 'move to this spot' etc). The **total immersion technique** is also used in several projects. Total immersion aims to make the learners aware of customs and cultures associated with the language, as well as to ensure that they use it in a context where only the target language is used. The students do not only get to read, write and speak in the target language but also get to know about the culture of the country studied (e,g, AmeriSpan Study Abroad).

The actual method used, whether in a project or in teaching to the syllabus, often needs to take into account other factors and/or be combined with other methods. In language learning projects several methods are often successfully combined, and therefore a categorization based on a single method is not sufficient. Methodologies that have proved successful in language learning and language teaching projects are discussed below. All projects exemplified have met at least some of the European Language Label criteria. The main methods can be categorized as follows:

**Mobility in learning: s**everal of the award-winning projects can be categorized under this heading. The use of technical devices such as computers, phones, and games in language education provides an opportunity to work on language learning from anywhere, as long as the student has access to the device and to the internet. Several interesting interactive language learning projects and programmes have been awarded the ELL.

There are other ways of achieving mobility in learning: for example, physical movement, away from the classroom or lecture room is also mobility. Using the target language in a realistic way outside the classroom, for example in a country

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[5] Gagnon, Armand A 1999: *Methodologies in Foreign Language Teaching.*
http://www.linguatics.com/methods.htm

where the language is spoken or with speakers of the target language, is another kind of mobility exemplified by some of the projects.

**Authenticity, interest and topics:** another feature of several of the projects that have been awarded the ELL is authenticity of use. In the learning of a new language it is important that the learner can try out their language skills in real contexts and, if possible, with native speakers of the language being learnt. In this kind of interaction students may have to choose topics or respond in an authentic and meaningful way, thereby increasing their motivation and genuinely practising their skills. The importance of authenticity in learning situations, and of using students' existing knowledge as a foundation was identified by John Dewey in 1900: "*From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in school comes from his inability to utilize the experience he gets outside while on the other hand he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning in school. That is the isolation of the school-its isolation from life*" (Dewey, 1900)[6].   Through online communication with students in other countries, for example, students gain knowledge about socio-cultural and family issues in those countries and they acquire a better understanding of their own society and culture as well.

**Comprehensiveness and student involvement:** an important aspect of quality in methodology is identifying and responding to the needs of learners, and hence increasing their motivation. This can be achieved through active participation and face to face communication between students, and is feasible in any school setting: the students are given the opportunity to prepare their own questions or discussion topics, and then to ask the questions and discuss the topics with their peers.

Donovan, Bransford, & Pellegrino[7] say the following in "How People Learn": "*Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp new concepts and information presented in the classroom, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom. This finding requires that teachers be prepared to draw out their students' existing understandings and help to shape them into an understanding that reflects the concepts and knowledge in the particular discipline of study.*"   Increasing motivation and student participation is key if a project is to be considered successful. Based on our discussion of methods and procedures in projects we have created a list of indicators that can be used when considering starting a project in order to check the quality of a language project design. Selected indicators may help to define the aims and the approach to be used, or when planning.

o   This project meets the needs of the students and takes into account the students' interests and personal aims

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[6] Dewey, J: 1900. *The School and Society*. University of Chicago Press, See also http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/Dewey/Dewey_1907/Dewey_1907c.html

[7] Bransford, John (ed). 2000. *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (expanded edition). National Research Council.

o This project reflects important issues in language learning, and it is rewarding and motivating to work on
o This project contributes to increased language learning and communicative skills
o This project enhances interaction among peers;
o This project will assist teachers/students to develop intercultural understanding and multilingualism
o This project provides opportunities for authentic language learning and communication
o This project design is transferable i.e. it can be used with different languages and in different countries
o This project offers students a new approach to language learning
o This project widens the use of ICT in language learning (social forums, mails, games, facts, history, literature, maps)
o This project provides an opportunity to use the language outside the classroom, in other environments
o This project is designed to create and try out new teaching materials.

## Case studies - methods and procedures in school education

Several of the award-winning projects achieve the goal of mobility in learning. The use of computers in language education provides an opportunity to work with language learning from anywhere, as long as the student has access to a computer. The "State of the Nation" project has been ongoing for over 15 years, which shows that their method works. The basic idea of the project is to arrange video conferences between students in Sweden, Britain and Portugal. In this way the students get first-hand information about differences and similarities in traditions, culture and society in these countries.
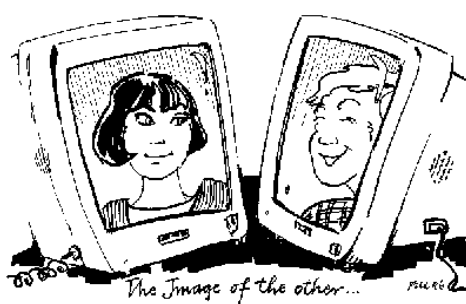
In the Danish project "The image of the other" e-mails are used as a means of learning about other countries and languages.  Many project promoters have created software that can be used in language learning. *French Learning in Cyberspace,* for example, is a virtual collaboration between various schools in Europe, Canada and Africa. The aim is to strengthen traditional foreign language learning with ICT, enabling students to use their foreign languages in oral and written communication worldwide. The internet 'conversations' between pupils range from abstract topics to very practical issues.  They read articles and write letters to French newspapers or they discuss and interact with other students. This method gives students a valuable opportunity to interact with real French people in class.

Another ICT-based project is "Professor Dr ABC". In this case, an interactive website was created, and learners are given the opportunity to practise their language skills wherever they are. The project aims to give children successful language learning experiences. The website is very user-friendly. When you enter it you have the option of choosing German or Danish right away. The pupils are then asked to help the professor with different tasks, and receive a medal after completing their assignments. A number of different games and songs are available on the website. The child can decide which activity to do, and gets instant feedback as well as repetition practice.

The examples above show that ICT can be used in different ways and for different purposes in language learning. Video conferences, Skype or e-mails can help to students in contact with students from other countries. There are several projects like these that are ongoing, and there are specific websites where you can find suitable contacts, such as ESP and Kidlink.

Mobility in learning can also be achieved through physical movement away from school..An example is "Language developing methods in pre-schools in Flemingsberg". The methodology of this project involved the library, the parents and the schools themselves in helping children to develop skills in Swedish as well as in their mother tongue. Through close cooperation between the school and the library each student was provided with a weekly book-bag. The bag contained books in the mother tongue as well as some in Swedish.

In the English Corner project materials were designed for early language learning in school. The project was based on theories of multiple intelligence and learning styles. One theory is that 25% of all children are kinaesthetic learners. This means that they learn best by touching and doing things actively. The project materials are in the form of suitcases that can be used in class. In the suitcases contain alphabet letter cards, story books, specific English items, drama equipment and much more. The contents and the way they are laid out are based on literature about learner autonomy, multiple intelligence and learning styles.

## Authenticity, interest and topics

In projects such as the ones mentioned above, the criteria relating to motivation, authenticity and topic are also met. One example is French learning in Cyberspace, where the pedagogic method is to involve a French-speaking "third party" who is familiar with the relevant topic or the part of the world where the students work. For example:

- a French class reads the same text or book, and can exchange opinions about it with students abroad

- a French author of a text or book which the students have just read can discuss it with them on the internet
- in a Belgian class, students discussed violence, racism and the Euro
- in one French class and two German classes, students discussed the concept of European identity.

Through online communication of this kind students learn about socio-cultural and family issues in other countries, and they gain a better understanding of their own society and culture.

Another example of a project which exemplifies authenticity is *Language Cafés*, which is a tutoring and socio-cultural programme for international exchange students at Lund University and pupils at Fågelskolan in Lund, Sweden. The pupils are from grade 8 and 9 (aged 14-15) of the Swedish compulsory school. The exchange students and the pupils meet in the school cafeteria, in a relaxed atmosphere, to talk about topics such as everyday life, culture, traditions and spare time activities in their respective countries.



## Comprehensiveness and student involvement



A project which meets the students' needs by facilitating the introduction of ICT in schools is the Alphabet Keyboard. The *Alphabet Keyboard* can help several groups of learners all over the world in all languages, for example children, bilingual people, and people with dyslexia. The pupils have fewer obstacles to overcome, and teachers can start teaching earlier. They can use the PC as a tool for learning rather than just for training pupils in the use of the PC. It is the small obstacles that waste the pupils' time. It has been shown that the *Alphabet Keyboard* reduces this wasted time significantly Video. Children from different countries can experience similar difficulties in recognizing the letters on a keyboard. The *Alphabet Keyboard* is now available in other language alphabets in addition to the Danish alphabet.

# 2.4 Tools for management and quality management

As we have seen in the previous sections, whether a given project is a success or not depends on the extent to which it complies with various criteria. These cover the processes involved in designing and running it, as well as in ensuring its sustainability after the project funding has officially ended. The development and performance indicators relating to the input and the output, the project outcomes, and its impact should also be measured in order to establish whether the project is successful. One should also not overlook the contribution that project promoters can make to a project's success: their enthusiasm, their innovative approach, their leadership and team-management, and their resourcefulness and ability to motivate others in difficult times also play a part in the success of a project.

Successful project managers are able to develop and use a number of tools to design, monitor, assess, and assure the quality of the project, as well as to determine how well it meets the original goals and keeps to the work plan.

Quality assurance (QA) involves systematic procedures to ensure that the quality standards for a given project are met. Every QA plan should include the following elements:
- Comparing progress with the goals initially set
- Measuring quality and compatibility with the objectives
- Monitoring development
- Gathering feedback that allows mistakes to be prevented or corrected.

Nowadays project management is standard in numerous industries, and a wide range of project management tools and specific software are available, including, for example, spreadsheets, flowcharts, questionnaires, report forms, and project management software. Many of these tools may prove useful in language projects. Below some of the tools which may easily be adapted to language education projects are discussed.

- A project plan is absolutely necessary because it describes the project scope and the approach or strategies chosen in order to meet the project objectives. Of course, the methodology can vary depending on the project purpose and target groups

- Self-assessment questionnaires can be used, for instance, in the first stages of project planning to make an initial evaluation of aspects such as levels of expertise in requisite areas, motivation, availability of resources etc.

- Checklists for project managers can be used to establish to what extent the project they are planning complies with various pre-established quality criteria. An example is the milestone checklist, which is one of the best tools for monitoring progress and determining whether the project is on track in terms of meeting the various deadlines in the plan.

- Discussions with focus groups can also be useful: these are short meetings with randomly selected groups of project participants or representatives of the target groups designed to gather their opinions and impressions as to whether the quality criteria are being met, and what changes might be desirable
- Meetings with staff/project members to review work done, issues encountered, new ideas etc are essential
- Feedback forms can be used to collect information from the parties involved in the project on quality aspects and any proposals for changes
- Time cards are useful to keep track of how team members are managing their work, and to help the project manager assess their individual performance
- Assessment reports (progress and final reports) on project activities and financial aspects are usually required by the sponsors (e.g. the European Commission) and need to be completed by project managers in the institutions participating in the project.

## *Checklist for quality in a language education project*

Based on our review of methods and procedures in projects we have created a checklist that can be used in order to check the quality of a language project.

### 1 Project beneficiaries

- ☐ The target groups are clear and well defined
- ☐ The learning needs of the target groups have been clearly identified and assessed
- ☐ Appropriate methods for reaching, motivating and involving the target groups have been decided on.

### 2 Project objectives and outcomes

- ☐ The project objectives are well defined and clearly explained
- ☐ The project, contributes to increased language learning and/or communicative skills
- ☐ The envisaged project outcomes and impact are achievable, useful and measurable. For examples of criteria and indicators, see section 2.2 REQUIREMENTS FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

### 3 Project planning

- ☐ The planned activities are well structured and there are adequate resources for their implementation
- ☐ The institution has:
  - the necessary human resources to run the project (enough project team members, a committed project manager)
  - the necessary financial and material resources to carry out the project activities
  -

☐ There is an appropriate plan for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the project
☐ A plan for evaluating the quality of the outcomes has been developed
☐ There is a clear plan for disseminating and exploiting the project results
☐ Key stakeholders have been identified and have been or can be contacted
☐ The institution has:
 – expertise in working with the chosen target group(s)
 – direct contact with representatives of the target group(s)
☐ The project plan defines criteria, standards and indicators for successful project management, project development and project outcomes.

## 4 Project management and implementation

☐ A management plan was developed at the beginning of the project; the management plan includes:
 – A project work plan with realistic timescales for all the project activities
 – A well developed budget (overall and per project partner) for each of the project activities
 – The assignment of clear responsibilities to each partner and/or team member
 – Mechanisms for efficient collaboration within the partnership
 – An effective communication system among partners
 – An appropriate reporting system
 – An internal document sharing system, available to all partners
 – Time management mechanisms
 – Problem solving mechanisms

☐ There are procedures for assuring the quality of project activities and outcomes (See sections 2.1 & 2.2 of these Guidelines), including:
 – carrying out a needs analysis with the target groups
 – choosing an appropriate methodology that corresponds to the learners' concrete needs
 – ensuring that there is coherence between the planned outcomes and activities and the overall project objectives
 – setting quality criteria for the proposed project products/outcomes
 – involving the target groups at all stages of project development, and obtaining feedback from them
 – testing any project products with the target groups and improving them accordingly

☐ There are time management mechanisms in place for:
 – monitoring whether the short term and longer term objectives have been met
 – identifying deviations from the work plan and initial goals, and adjusting them as required

- □ There are reporting and feedback mechanisms in place so that:
    - − periodic internal reports are prepared on completed and on-going activities
    - − the project partners use the same reporting templates and describe the results in similar ways, for example templates for reporting on:
        - □  the activities carried out in the separate contexts
        - □ the costs incurred
        - □ dissemination activities
        - □ feedback from participants and stakeholders
    - − internal evaluations are made
    - − independent external evaluations
    - − recommendations are put forward by the internal and external evaluators and, if necessary, changes are made
- □ feedback is provided on partner reports
- □ There is a clear plan for dissemination during the project and after it ends; the dissemination plan:
    - − creates maximum awareness of the project and its goals
    - − Is adapted to the project objectives and target groups
    - − Is reasonable in terms of the financial resources needed.

## *Good examples of school education projects*

Becoming aware of the existence of European languages (see Despertar a las lenguas – Spain).

Dealing with key issues in language learning: (see Europaenheten - lär och utvecklas för framtiden/ Europaenheten - Educating for the Future, 2003 – Sweden): The project's goal was to empower teenagers who felt insecure because they had not mastered Swedish and did not have good social skills.

Achieving project impact: registrations of children at kindergartens with trilingual teaching doubled during the project period (see Three Hands, 2007 – Austria).

# 2.5 Follow up

## *What is "follow-up" in projects?*

**Follow- up: definitions and implications**

Here are some definitions of "follow-up" and its primary usage in common English taken from the free dictionary (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/follow+up):

*Follow up (n)*
*"…the act or an instance of following up, as to further an end or review new developments: The follow-up is often as important as the initial contact in gaining new clients"*
*" …one that follows so as to further an end or increase effectiveness: The software was a successful follow-up to the original product"*
*"…. an action or thing that serves to increase the effectiveness of a previous one, as a second or subsequent letter, phone call, or visit"*
*"… an article or a report giving further information on a previously reported item of news"*

*Follow up (v)*
*"..to increase the effectiveness or enhance the success of by further action: followed up her interview with an e-mail"*

As can be seen from this, the main meaning of "follow-up" is to **increase effectiveness** of the previous act or initiative, to capitalise on the success achieved in further development. In the context of European projects, the term "follow-up" has kept its original meaning but has acquired some additional connotations.  The glossary
(http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/valorisation/glossary_en.htm#FOLLOW-UP_ACTIVITIES) defines follow-up activities as those that take place after the project has finished, i.e. after the official end date.

The aim of follow-up activities is to keep the results of a given project alive and make them sustainable. This could involve:
- updating the results after the project has been completed
- obtaining recognition or certification of the outcomes
- persuading policy-makers to make use of the results
- transfer of the results to, and exploitation of them by, other sectors or target-groups, or in other environments
- commercialisation of certain project results.

To a large extent, the type of follow up activities to be undertaken will be suggested by the project result or output (see also: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/valorisation/glossary_en.htm#RESULT).
Some outputs, for example a website or a database, might need regular updating, while others, such as a course or an innovative method, might be transferred and adapted for new types of end-users, or might be expanded and adapted to meet other requirements or needs. Whatever the situation, further activities undertaken either by the project team or by other stakeholders will generally stem from the original idea of the project, so ideas for possible follow-up should be identified at the start of a project, for example in the 'exploitation' and/or sustainability' sections of European project applications, where ideas are put forward for further activities once the project period is over.

Follow-up activities may enlarge the target group and/or end-user groups in a very natural way: the project output may be welcomed by and applied to other sectors or other user communities[8]. In other cases, the follow-up activities may eventually lead to another project.

## Follow-up related to the European Language Label (ELL)

In terms of a project cycle, the application for the ELL, and if it is successful, the award of the Label, is a follow–up activity in itself: in most cases it happens after the project has reached its administrative completion and it is based on the project results or outcomes. The applicants pursue a specific aim, namely to obtain recognition of the project achievements at European level in order to increase the visibility of the project results and raise their institutional or individual profiles. The process of selection and the award ceremony are often covered by national or regional media, giving the project results and promoters publicity, which may then lead to further promotion and exploitation of the project outcomes.

While carrying out research on the ELL case studies, the NELLIP team interviewed promoters of projects awarded the ELL about their experiences and achievements and methods and approaches, including the type and scale of activities that followed the ELL award (see the NELLIP National and Transnational Reports at http://nellip.pixel-online.org/RP_intro.php). The data collected on the follow up activities undertaken by project teams receiving the ELL award underlines its role in raising the project promoter's profile, facilitating networking, and initiating other projects.

## Follow-up activities in ELL awarded projects

### Deciding on and planning follow-up activities

As mentioned, follow-up activities are carried out after the end of the project but need to be considered before and during the project period. As such, they are often discussed and decided on during the planning for sustainability of the project and its exploitation. Such


Critical Thinking

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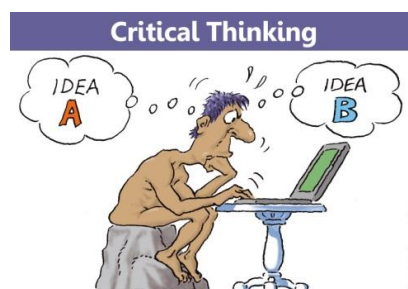
[8]    see    more    about    beneficiaries    and    stakeholders    at
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/valorisation/glossary_en.htm

planning is an essential ingredient for the quality of the project.

Follow-up activities can be divided into roughly three groups:
- ongoing support for the project products
- developing and/or adjusting the product to other groups or purposes
- maintaining interest and motivation in using the project products.

The choice of follow-up will be dictated by the nature of the project outcomes, and also by the needs and contexts of potential users. When thinking about follow up activities, several questions arise:

1) how long should the follow up last?
   - This is very important when a project product or service requires financial or human resources;

2) who will own the project outcome and be in charge of managing it?
   - This also includes the sharing of profits if the project outcome is commercialized;

3) who is responsible for the follow up actions – the project coordinator, individual partners, or someone else? Who else will be involved?
   - The partner(s) involved will look into the ethical issues, agree on copyright, and consult other partners on further development or changes as required;

4) will the follow up require training?
   - some preparatory training might be needed if the project outcome is taken up by another group of users.

## *Follow-up – examples from school-based projects*

What specific guidance can be offered for those who are planning to make the most of the outcomes of their project? The examples below illustrate several common types of follow up activities carried out in projects in the school education sector that have received the ELL award.

- **Open the window -** 2003, Portugal

  The project aimed to promote extensive reading from secondary level onwards, and to make this kind of language learning more beneficial to the community at large through the use of ICT. The idea was to involve not only the school itself, but the community which surrounds the school. The interaction between school community and local community is an enriching aspect from the point of view of lifelong learning. The project has run for 13 years and is a very good example of how a great idea and good methodology can be successfully used far beyond the formal end of the project. Every two years an illustrated book is published and sold in the school and wider community. Feedback obtained from readers is seen as very valuable. Parents and local authorities take part in a book fair, which provides strong motivation for children and school staff. The team tries to involve all the students interested in reading and writing, and also those with artistic skills, who illustrate the stories and poems. The published books are offered to other schools and teaching organisations, which raises the school's profile and

sets an example. According to the project promoters, their initiative can be transferred to teaching any other foreign language. The project materials are made available online by a publisher.

- **Handmade English - 2009, Italy**

*Handmade English* is an online application aimed at teachers and students. It gives them the opportunity to make use of exercises in English online. The project uses specific learning strategies, like total physical response, pair work, role-play and self assessment. After receiving the ELL award, the ELL logo was included in a letter of presentation sent to one thousand teachers in different Italian regions (Lazio, Tuscany, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont) to encourage them to use this innovative resource. In addition, the promoters received financial support from the Fondazione Telecom Italia. These funds were then used to publish books and to improve the portal.

## *Long live the project!*

Once the project is over and receives the acknowledgement it deserves, such as the European Language Label, there is a natural wish to extend its life and exploit its outcomes. What steps can be taken to keep your project alive, attractive and useful? Here are some follow-up recommendations that may prove useful:

a. **Use the ELL logo and Certificate: a** very important step is to use these as widely as possible. The institutional or project websites are efficient and cheap ways of informing the world about the project and its creators. The ELL logo on the school or company website will be seen by parents looking for a school for their offspring, by clients, who will appreciate European level recognition, and by staff. The European Language Label and the use of the logo in the school are also very important for school children. If they have not taken part in the ELL awarded project, there is still a fair chance at they will do so in the future.

b. **Make your achievements known to a wider public:** do not hesitate to promote your achievements at public and professional events such as fairs, seminars, workshops or conferences. Quite often, presenting the outcomes of your project to a wider audience opens up new opportunities for follow-up, and may lead to further research or publications.

c. **Maintain and widen the network:** presenting the project to a wider audience may also lead to new project ideas or to closer networking between different institutions and different countries, to new partnerships and to further mutually beneficial cooperation.

d. **Offer the project product(s) to other teachers and users:** it should not be forgotten that schools – unlike some other sectors of education – cater to a wide variety of age groups. Once it has been tried with one group of pupils, you can use the same product with other pupils of the same age. There is a fair chance that both teachers and school children will adjust the products to their own needs

or preferences. Use the vast potential of ICT to adapt and extend the way in which the project outcomes are used.

e. **Look for ways to commercialize the project products:** follow-up often requires financial and human resources. Look for opportunities to commercialize the project results. Remember that the ELL is a recognized badge of high quality: use it to negotiate with businesses. Publishers and web designers may give you practical tips about what to do with the product, for example, converting the material into an e-book or CD, setting a registration fee etc. Commercial exploitation will help you raise money for other activities and projects.

# 2.6 Motivating language students and teachers

Motivation is one of the most important factors in the process of learning, and considerable efforts are devoted to generating and maintaining it. Motivation is defined as a driving force, stimulus or influence, i.e. something that causes a student to act (Merriam-Webster[9], 1997). Others see it as the investment of effort to accomplish results (DuBrin 2008)[10].

However motivation is also an intrinsic force innate to human beings. Any action requires motivation if it is to be carried out with success. Without motivation, effective learning cannot take place. However, it needs to be present both in teachers and students.

### *Is motivation an independent variable?*

In the context of language learning, motivation has been seen, to some extent, as an independent variable. However, motivation is not an individual or isolated variable. There are many different types of motivation: motivation to learn languages, motivation related to the class, to the topics dealt with, and/or resulting from the tools and strategies used during the lessons, for example.

We can also differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. On the one hand, students in the process of learning can be engaged in the subject matter as a result of the teacher's approach or attitude. This kind of motivation comes from outside and is mainly the teachers´ responsibility. On the other hand, students themselves can be motivated as a result of their personal interests, needs and preferences. This intrinsic motivation obviously varies from individual to individual.

In learning a second language (L2), the more motivation the learner has, the greater the chances of success. Research suggests that motivation may influence language learning outcomes more than - and independently from - language aptitude (Gardner & Lambert, 1972)[11]. Thus motivation needs to be fostered as much as possible because it aids language learning no matter how skilful one is at it. In addition, language learning can have a considerable impact on a person's social and psychological well-being, and confidence and self-esteem can also be enhanced through foreign language learning.

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[9] Merriam-Webster (1997). Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, Houghton-Mifflin.
[10] DuBrin, Andrew. (2008). *Essentials of Management* (8th edition). Cengage Learning.
[11] Gardner, Robert & Wallance Lambert (1972). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second-language Learning.* Newbury House/

Motivation is also decisive for autonomous learning, which can have a considerable impact on students' progress. If teachers, parents, peers, etc. are also motivated, learning is consolidated and the effort required may be reduced as learning is in some senses a shared experience. This supports the theory of self determination or SDT (Vansteenkiste et al, 2006)[12]. According to this theory, autonomy, competence and relatedness are psychological needs we all have. Thus, fostering motivation may help students to be more confident, more autonomous, and to broaden their knowledge of the world itself, as well as increase their satisfaction and enjoyment.

Studies on motivation show that intrinsically motivated students perform much better in the classroom (Dörnyei 1998[13]; Bernard 2012[14]; Thanasoulas 2002[15]). This evidence suggests that these students are more competent, more interested in the language they are learning, and more satisfied with their learning. Those who are intrinsically motivated are also more involved and persistent, and they take an active part in the learning process. These are key ingredients for successful L2 learning, and this is why motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, is so important in language learning, which is an endless process requiring considerable lifelong effort.

## *Motivation - a keystone within the teaching/learning process at the European Language Label*



Every year, European Language Label applications are assessed according to certain criteria, which include innovation, transferability, a marked European orientation, and the capacity to motivate learners. But teachers' motivation is also key, and good projects can increase their motivation.

Generally, project coordinators begin projects on the strength of their personal motivation in order to improve teaching and their students' language learning experiences. However, receiving the European Language Label is also motivating since it is recognition of the organizers' efforts, and of the educational value of their ideas. In addition, it contributes to dissemination of the initiative and therefore to its sustainability.

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[12] Vansteenkiste, M., Lens, W., & Deci, E. L. (2006). Intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents in self-determination theory: another look at the quality of academic motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, *41*, 19-31. Also available at http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/browse-publications/index.php?option=com_sdt&view=SearchPublications&task=domainSearch&domain=6
[13] Dörnyei, Zoltán (1998) 'Motivation in second and foreign language learning', in *Language Teaching* vol. 31 (117-135). Also available at http://www.zoltandornyei.co.uk/uploads/1998-dornyei-lt.pdf
[14] Jaclyn, Bernard (2010). 'Motivation in Foreign Language Learning: the Relationship between Classroom Activities, Motivation, and Outcomes in a University Language-Learning Environment'(thesis).Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburg, USA
 Also available at http://repository.cmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1077&context=hsshonors
[15] Thanasoulas, Dimitrios (2002): 'Motivation and Motivating in the Foreign Language Classroom'. *Internet TESL Journal*. Available at http://iteslj.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Motivation.html

Motivation has received more and more attention in education, and especially in language education. This has led to a mushrooming of language teaching strategies. But teachers are crucial in making these strategies work, and from the teaching perspective, any strategy is useful if it leads to effective learning.

Below is a list of some factors that help increase or sustain motivation. It should be noted that this is a general classification, since most good practice involves more than one motivational strategy.

### *General motivational strategies applied in different educational sectors*

Based on the analysis of examples of best practice in projects that have been awarded the European Language Label carried out by the Nellip Network, the most important ways of fostering motivation within the four main sectors - School Education, Adult Education, Higher Education, Vocational Education and Training – appear to be the following:

1. **Practical and amusing content and activities**: games, simulations, shows or contests are used to engage the students' attention and increase their enjoyment of the process of language learning.

2. **Dynamic methods & innovative approaches in language learning**: it is important to establish a clear learning route involving an action-oriented approach.

3. **Varied and up-to-date learning resources**: these enrich and increase the chances of effective learning.

4. **Authentic teaching and learning materials**: these enhance students' motivation and facilitate language acquisition.

5. **Specific background (ESP/CLIL)**: learning languages for specific and/or professional or study purposes can also boost motivation.

6. **Use of ICT**: this encourages people to be aware of the possibilities of current technology.

7. **Promotion of autonomous learning**: this can encourage students to be more independent, empowering them to take their own initiatives.

8. **Fostering mobility**: this raises students' awareness of cultural differences between countries helping them to develop intercultural competence.

9. **Access to multicultural contexts**: cultural knowledge and experience also increase students' intercultural competences

10. **Encouragement of multilingualism**: the more languages students can speak, the greater their chances of finding interesting job opportunities.

11. **Opportunities for social interaction in the target language**: interacting with each other is really valuable since it provides a chance to make friends and become familiar with different social settings.

12. **Involvement of learners in the world of work**: this encourages students to consider the value of the target language(s) in their future careers.

13. **Participation in the local community**: motivation can be increased thanks to the interaction between the educational institution and its local community. This shows students that it is also possible to learn outside the classroom.

14. **Recognition of the quality of the project**: coordinators are motivated when they are rewarded and congratulated for their projects. It is the push someone needs to feel energetic enough to get involved in another project.

Bearing in mind that learners are motivated by different factors and that the most relevant motivational strategies will be selected for each educational sector, it is important to understand that motivation in higher education differs from motivation in school education, in adult education, and in vocational education and training. They share some features, but they also differ in terms of the methods and procedures used by teachers, which play such an important role in students' learning and motivation. Obviously, the strategies used to motivate a six year-old child are very different from those used to enhance the motivation of a fifteen year-old teenager. In all cases, students' motivation should be stimulated in many different ways in each lesson (Debnath 2005[16]; D'Souza and Maheshwari 2010[17]).

## *Met and missed expectations*

It could be said that the main initial expectations of the promoters of projects featured in the Nellip national reports have been met, since their projects were all awarded the European Language Label. This enhanced the visibility of their initiatives and showed that the projects complied with the ELL quality criteria. But not all language projects have the same impact. Some projects are only partially successful due to lack of finance or to the design of sustainability strategies. According to the Nellip transnational report, most of the awarded projects struggled to continue beyond the end of their funding period.. We should bear in mind the need to try to ensure the continuity and longevity of projects.

## *Motivation – examples of good practice from school-based projects*

Motivation is a keystone of the teaching/learning process that should be considered from the point of view both of the students and of the entire teaching community. Children learn most effectively by discovering and doing something which challenges them to think and to ask questions, not from listening to or reading about things. Working with objects and carrying out real-world projects that involve collecting data, research, interviews, assessing evidence, drawing conclusions and making decisions helps students to think more deeply, and to discover the implications of ideas through direct or simulated immersion in them.

Most of the initiatives receiving awards at this level focus on the playful side of language learning. Games, songs, plays, task-based projects, amusing resources, shows or contests are used to engage students' attention and provide good

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[16] Debnath, S. C. (2005). 'College student motivation: an interdisciplinary approach to an integrated learning systems model. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, 6(3), 168-189.
[17] D'Souza K.A. and S.K Maheshwari (2010). 'Factors influencing student performance in the introductory management science course'. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 14(3), 99-120.

opportunities to use the target language. Also, language is not studied just during language lessons: it is explored in different ways in the other subjects on the curriculum, so students gain some knowledge of social, cultural or historical aspects of the language in question and its community of speakers. Traditional language teaching materials are modified or are replaced by more topical resources. Language is closely bound to culture, and contact between students of different cultures encourages communication and tolerance.

The following initiatives serve as examples of these features:

1) **Plurilingualism**: Plurilingualism (Austria) uses the target languages in different subject lessons, and children learn in a coherent context that promotes linguistic immersion.

2) **Intercultural integration**: Becoming a better global citizen (Czech Republic) is a project in which interdisciplinary teamwork enhances interaction between peers from different cultural backgrounds.

3) **Information and Communication Technologies**: E-Journal (Belgium) is a first-class example of the use of modern technologies as a means for expressing ideas and for constructivist learning.

4) **Communication at an early age**: the Spanish project, ALEHOP, uses a number of resources to get children to use the second language in a stimulating environment.

# 3. Exploitation and Networking in European Language Labelled Initiatives

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# 3.1 Dissemination, exploitation, sustainability

## Background

Before engaging in a study of how to carry out exploitation and networking initiatives in language projects it is important to answer other questions, namely why are project resources (budget and staff) invested in these activities and what are the goals of promotion? Some of the most frequent answers are listed below.

**To tell end users about your project**
This is the prime reason for promoting the project, of course, but it may be worth thinking through all the potential benefits for users. The users might be a diverse group, including, for instance, learners of different ages, teachers, educational institutions and other local training agencies, and the benefits for each of these groups will be different. The project needs to reach the maximum number of individuals in the target group(s) for a minimum of expenditure, so promoting the project in the most appropriate, most targeted way is crucial to success.

**To contribute to the implementation of European policy**
There are obvious reasons for the importance of languages to Europe. Think of integration, identity, social cohesion, economy, employment, mobility… However valid these general reasons are, a project usually needs to have more specific reasons which are aspects of these general ones to make the project special.

**To contribute to the implementation of national/ regional/local policies**
The project may support these at various levels in a range of areas – for instance, a national drive for vocational training or to meet local employment needs, and it is important to be aware of how it fits in. If the project contributes to these policies in some way, it may gain support from agencies which can help with its promotion.

**To inform sponsors and funding bodies**
These agencies have supported your project and will want to know how you're doing. Regular, succinct feedback on the progress of the project (especially if it's positive!) is always a good thing. If it is a European Commission (EC) project, the evaluation process is a requirement. But other agencies, including the policy-makers referred to above, could also be interested: your project may help them achieve their own policy goals. And they may be able to contribute to the progress of the project if they know what stage it is at – for instance, by suggesting other relevant organisations which could be interested, or by alerting you to new policy developments or events which the project could feed in to.

**To support and enhance the image of your own organization**
The project will, of course, support your institution's objectives, but it may also help raise its profile or open up new networks and partnerships which the organisation could benefit from. In order to do this, the project needs to be promoted to the right people internally. If your project manages to attract media/press attention or gain an award this will be beneficial to your organisation.

**To increase the impact of your project by networking**

Networking is generally regarded as the essential path to extend and enhance the activities of projects by embedding them in wider and more diverse social and economic milieus. There are organisations that can use their contact networks and communications systems to keep the project alive. This is a serious issue for some projects, because, however successful they are, it can be hard to secure a renewal of funding, particularly as funding agencies may prefer to invest their money in new projects.

**To tell commercial organisations that you have a product to sell**

They could significantly extend the life of the project by selling the end result(s) in a specialist market or even to the general public. The European Language Label aims at fostering the language competences of European citizens through an award for particularly innovative projects in the field of language teaching and learning.

## Management of change and innovation

One of the main criteria set by the European Commission in financing a language project is the innovation that the project brings to the language education landscape of the European Union. This criterion is also one of the six used for evaluating whether a project is awarded the European Language Label (stated in the form of originality and creativity): *"Initiatives should be original and creative. They should introduce previously unknown approaches to language learning, but also make sure they are appropriate to the students concerned"*.

Dissemination and exploitation (and their direct impact on sustainability) should facilitate change and innovation by testing the limits of the comfort zone, finding a balance between promoting innovation, ensuring mainstreaming, and facilitating the implementation of good practice that makes promotion and mainstreaming worthwhile.

An important question to be considered when designing a project (and implicitly the promotion strategy for it) is why innovations fail. In language related projects, the most common causes are:

- The requirements and expectations of stakeholders are unclear
- the staff implementing the innovation are not properly trained in the new skills required
- the project is under-resourced in terms of money, time and staff; and
- the target beneficiaries are not adequately supported during their attempts to implement the innovation (lack of communication from project promoters).

## 3.1.1 Dissemination

"Dissemination is defined as a planned process of providing information on the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the results of programmes and initiatives to key actors. It occurs as and when the results of programmes and initiatives become available" - The Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 – Glossary.

The main goals of dissemination activities are:

- to design a plan for announcing what is to come in the life of the project
- to communicate with stakeholders
- to raise public awareness
- to promote new project outputs.

The planning of a dissemination strategy involves the main steps listed below. We recommend that you also analyse the successful examples provided in the case studies, which are taken from projects that were awarded the ELL:

- define the dissemination channels
- define specifically the roles of the dissemination coordinator and of the other project partners
- allocate a budget and a number of staff days for each product or activity, and focus on getting value for money
- specify the duration of each dissemination activity and the development time envisaged for a dissemination activity or event.

Example: The "Let's become a bilingual family!" project took place between 2010 and 2012 and was partially funded by the European Union under the Lifelong Learning Programme. The project was awarded the ELL in Romania in 2011.

Dissemination can (and should) take place both within the partner institutions as well as outside them. Some examples of dissemination activities that can be carried out within the partner institutions are:

- placing information about the project, with links to the project web portal, on the websites of each partner institution

- exchanging project related information during meetings with staff or trainees of the partner institutions

- displaying and updating notices in every partner institution to inform staff, beneficiaries and networks about project events, and distributing project leaflets/flyers among staff and learners

- participating in local/national and international workshops, seminars, conferences or fairs

- ensuring media and social media (online or offline) coverage: press releases, interviews, announcements, brochures, newsletters, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs etc.

### 3.1.2 Exploitation

Exploitation includes 'mainstreaming' and 'multiplication'. Mainstreaming is the planned process of transferring the successful results of projects and initiatives to appropriate decision-makers in regulated local, regional, national and European systems. Multiplication is the planned process of convincing individual end-users to adopt and/or apply the results of programmes and initiatives." The Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 – Glossary.

The main goals of exploitation activities are:

- to seek to change policies and current practices
- to ensure  project results are adopted by end-users (target groups)
- to 'multiply' the project's results and best practice
- to transfer the project practices and products to other contexts in other educational settings, other countries etc.

A successful exploitation strategy involves the main steps outlined below. We recommend that you also analyse the successful examples provided in the case studies, which are taken from projects that were awarded the ELL.

- define channels and approaches to maximise impact
- create an exploitation strategy both at the level of the partnership and at national, regional and local levels
- allocate a budget and number of staff days to exploitation during the funded life of the project.

Example: the Online Networking Platform for Language Learning project. ISPY project developed a new online platform to support the study of foreign languages such as Romanian, English, Spanish, German, Polish and Dutch. The project was awarded the ELL in Romania in 2012.

### 3.1.3 Sustainability

Sustainability is the capacity of a project to continue to function beyond the end of the contract. The project results are used and exploited continuously. Sustainability means the results are used and exploited in the long term. The Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 – Glossary.

The main goals of sustainability are:

- to ensure that the project produces lasting benefits for participants and the community at large
- to ensure that the project survives once the funding ends

Sustainability is one of the greatest challenges for projects.

When deciding on a sustainability strategy we need to focus on service providers (i.e. the project developers) on the one hand and customers (the target group) on the other.

In planning for sustainability, the most important actions to consider are:

- creating a sustainability plan, a commercialization plan or a business plan for selling the tangible outcomes of your project
- defining the roles of the sustainability coordinator and of the other partners in this
- drawing up an intellectual property rights agreement (or IPR)



The ALL for Autonomous Language Learning project ran from 2006 to 2009 and was partially funded by the European Union under the Lingua 2 Programme. This project developed foreign language courses for four less widely used and taught languages (BG, LT, RO, TK). The project was awarded the ELL in Romania in 2009.

## How to create a sustainability plan

A sustainability plan should ensure that the partner institutions have a coherent and realistic strategy for continuing the project after the funding ends. The best ways to ensure this is either to find a sponsor that is willing to continue to fund the initiatives, or to sell the project products. If the latter option is chosen, the best way to approach selling the products is to create a business plan in which income and expenditure are projected over a period of years. A business plan is a tool for assessing business proposals, a roadmap for meeting business goals and checking outcomes. As in any industry, a business plan for selling the products of language projects should be flexible.

## Possible structure of a business plan



a. Executive summary
b. Product description and distinctive value
c. Potential markets
d. Competition
e. Financial plan
f. Management team and organization
g. Marketing and sales strategy
h. Strategic alliances
i. Principal risks, and exit strategies

The business plan should involve both present partners and new people or institutions interested in continuing the project in the future. Creating an economic interest makes the project more likely to continue after its lifetime and become self-sustainable.

## Intellectual property rights (IPR)

An IPR agreement defines the rights of all partners involved in the project in the event of publication, commercial use or other exploitation of the project materials. Early on, partners should clearly state their (financial) expectations with regard to their contribution when it comes to capitalising on the project results. Often project coordinators leave any discussions regarding IPR until the end of the project. This is not advisable as there may be heated discussions and a lot of time may be needed to settle potential conflicts.

The essential components of an IPR agreement are:

1. Definition of the contractual parties
2. Definition of the terms used
3. Object of the contract
4. Points agreed upon
5. Signatures of all contractual parties.

# 3.2 Networking in initiatives awarded the European Language Label

### Networking - overview

Networking is one of the most critical features of most project design and management. In European Commission funded projects in particular, networking has come to be seen as a vital element in achieving sustainable outcomes, as well as a key component of the strategies for exploitation, dissemination and creating added value. Networking is generally regarded as the essential path to extend and enhance the activities of projects by embedding them in wider and more diverse social and economic milieus.

It is important to analyze the key elements of networking as a concept, and to explore the ways in which networking works or does not work in achieving agreed goals. Networking in itself can be viewed in many ways. However, it is important to outline and agree the standards and criteria that can make networking a key high quality means of achieving maximum impact across a number of areas rather than a mere compliance activity.

In ICT, networking is the practice of linking two or more computing devices together for the purpose of sharing data. Networks are built using a mix of computer hardware and computer software. In a generalized context, networking can be defined as the exchange of information, data or services among individuals, groups, agencies and/or institutions. In the field of commerce and industry, however, networking is viewed more specifically as the intentional cultivation and nurturing of productive relationships across a variety of dimensions, for employment, business, professional or corporate purposes, and as a key means to secure added value.

Business networking is thus a social and economic activity in which individuals, clusters of individuals, or groups with similar interests and experience recognize, create, act on or sustain opportunities, contacts, communication systems or products. In this sense it is another form of social networking with a specific focus on business of professional activities. Several prominent business and professional organizations have created models for networking activity. Using or drawing on such models can enable individuals and groups to build new business relationships and generate business opportunities.

All human relationships can be regarded in some sense as networks. Here, however, networking refers to the intentional use of contacts, links and structured experiences in order to support specified professional activities. Most networking initiatives have some element of advertising or public relations: they develop or extend marketing efforts. Networking is a low-cost activity that involves more personal commitment than money – but it also requires planning, design and evaluation to ensure that it is effective and delivers an impact.

## Rationale

Communications are at the heart of networking. Project management often entails identifying innovative processes and evidence-based statements of the needs to be met. While some of the pure research required for the initial phases of a project can be solitary and desk-based, the critical point of growth is when the project actors (both internal and external) begin the process of communicating. This involves being able to formulate issues, themes and questions for other stakeholders to consider, as well as engaging in a two-way process of critical reflection and shared learning. Clear communications facilitate this, and are themselves therefore dependent on expressing clear meanings, and using appropriate terminology and a shared language. Clear and planned communications and shared meaning are two prerequisites for effective networking.

Another key reason for taking a networking approach is the issue of added value. Each project is an attempt to develop something new, or to build on existing knowledge, techniques and practices in novel ways. This can be enhanced and strengthened by adding value through aspects of practice, technique or knowledge that were not present at the outset. Collaborative engagement between different stakeholders often leads to unexpected learning outcomes and innovations that would not otherwise have occurred. This extends and deepens the usefulness of the project and is a key outcome of the networking process.

As networking extends the audience for the project concept and process it attracts new interested stakeholders. These play a critical role in providing feedback and evaluative assessment of the processes and outcomes of the project. They therefore also help to ensure the sustainability of the project or its products. Networking significantly increases the audience and pool of potential stakeholders and, as this happens, a critical mass can be reached who know and share the project outcomes and products, and thus these have a stronger chance of continuing to be used after the seed-funding expires. In a time of uncertainty and economic crisis there are no guarantees, but networking does at least greatly enhance the chances of a project being sustainable in the long term.

Another key reason for networking is the qualitative dimension, namely an increase in mutual learning. This shared learning is a creative and dynamic process that extends and deepens the impact of the project by facilitating the exchange of knowledge, joint action, and partnerships which strengthen the capacity for individual and collective research and innovation. Shared learning also creates a new base of shared expertise, which can serve as a springboard for subsequent work or for the extension and modification of existing products and outcomes.

Where EU-funded projects and programmes are concerned, a final reason for networking is to increase the impact of the European dimension of the project. This is partly because good networks will aspire to influence EU policies in order to make them correspond more closely to European priorities. With this in mind, project stakeholders will engage and debate with EU institutions, participate in EU policy consultations and contribute to the transformational learning that comes from researched and proven best practice which is validated by as wide a range of stakeholders as possible.

## Methodology

Having established the definitions of networking and looked at the rationale for establishing networks, it is helpful to examine the methodology used in the construction, extension and maintenance of networks. Very often projects are based on good ideas and defined needs – that is how programmes obtain initial funding. But in order to develop and turn these ideas into real and meaningful change with impact on policy, both collaboration and support structures are needed.

Constructing sustainable and viable networks involves a number of critical stages:

- The first of these is establishing a common vision. This may be based on specific interest groups or broadened out to include additional sectors or disciplines. Essentially, all stakeholders should be in broad agreement about the importance of the topic or activity around which the network is being constructed. Sharing a common vision or purpose will ensure growth of networks and their associated structures.

- Networks frequently operate best when network members have shared values. The most important are trust, a willingness to take risks, and collaborative intent.

- Networks need to build on shared experience, basing themselves on common issues (like language learning) or specific sectors (school type or level). At least initially, these shared experiences underpin the networking activities being undertaken.

- A critical stage is the building of networks using existing contacts. These contacts emerge from previous work, earlier networks, like-minded stakeholders, or professional bodies and agencies. The contact details may have become outdated, so checking their current validity is important.

- The next stage is contacting new sources based on existing contacts and professional bodies, or engaging new potential stakeholders in innovative and stimulating ways. In addition to identifying potential new members of networks, this entails creative thinking and proactive marketing.

- Marketing and promotion are key elements in advertising networks, and it is crucially important to demonstrate what advantages and benefits network involvement can bring to existing and potential partners.

- As networks grow, they begin to attract new and expanding audiences which themselves may go far beyond the groups originally envisaged. Building a network therefore requires mechanisms to respond to requests for further information from potential or existing members. Administrative and monitoring systems are also required to ensure that networks remain fresh and relevant to those involved.

- The advent of advanced ICT support in the last two decades has resulted in the massive development of e-networking using social media and Web 2.0 technologies. This can result in an exponential increase in network membership (some networks can rapidly reach hundreds or thousands of members), but the qualitative aspects may be questionable, particularly as regards longer term impact, engagement, interest and value. Specific networks such as the special

interest ones on Linked In, can play a very useful role in communication and information-sharing. To what extent they contribute to added value and/or sustainability is, however, more debatable.

## Defining outcomes

A key task for networks right from their establishment through to the development of agreed modes of operation is to clarify what the key outcomes of networking are or should be. This involves agreeing on answers to a set of questions about what the network could or should do both for its original project designers and for the wider range of stakeholders. Successful networks are based on their relevance to all stakeholder needs. Dynamic networks continually develop new products, engage new actors, implement interesting innovations and add to the learning community which they are part of.

The term 'professional learning community' has become quite commonplace in educational circles. The term describes a collegial group united in its commitment to a given outcome. In the case of education, the commitment is to student learning. The community engages in a variety of activities including sharing a vision, working and learning collaboratively, visiting and observing other classrooms, and participating in shared decision-making. Some of the benefits of professional learning communities to educators and students are a reduction in the isolation of teachers, better-informed and more committed teachers, and academic gains for students.

The idea of a learning organization where people continually expand their capacity to deliver the outcomes they desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together, is relatively new. In the educational setting, a learning community involves people from multiple constituencies at all levels continually working together. Such collaborative work centres on reflective dialogue, in which staff have conversations about students and teaching and learning, and identify key issues, problems and solutions. Those engaged in such conversations learn to apply new ideas and information to solving problems, and are therefore able to create new learning conditions for students. Key tools in this process are shared values and vision; supportive physical, and social environments; and shared personal practice.

Defining outcomes in new learning communities is the bedrock of effective networking in both the general and specific sense. It implies that all stakeholders begin to develop some kind of shared engagement with the themes and issues around which the network has been constructed – language learning, quality approaches, innovative technologies, for example. Shared engagement also means that defined benefits can be delivered by pooling resources and sharing the pedagogical tools and insights that emerge from critical reflection and evaluative application.  This is high quality networking: people no longer use networks just to meet, greet and exchange contact details, but use them to actually engage in communications and activities which extend and deepen shared understanding and deliver outcomes. Such networking is inseparable from sharing values and perspectives. In ideal circumstances, this may also lead to networking becoming a

creative forum for moving beyond personal and sectional comfort zones (academic departments, for example) and adopting a mode of working where there is real originality, innovation and creative endeavour.

## Constructing networks

The development of networks can follow broad general principles, but in reality will be shaped by the subject matter being focused on, the professional profile of stakeholders, the focus points and objectives of special interest group, and the resources available to the audiences and stakeholders concerned. There is no one "look" for professional networks: they can be large or small; and they can work within formal settings and structures or can operate more loosely. Professional networks, such as language learning communities, can be school-based, region-based, national or international. They engage in a wide range of activities. Professional learning communities and networks can have many different profiles but they must include participants who share the following beliefs and behaviours:

- Caring deeply about learning and the issues focused on in the project
- Feeling free to take risks
- Challenging each other and raising everyone's expectations
- Respecting and valuing perspectives other than their own
- Seeking and valuing the inputs of others
- Striving to work and perform better.
- Continually developing.

In addition to sharing common beliefs and behaviours, successful networking and professional learning communities share a common focus. Participation in a particular learning community should actually be determined by a focus on a clear, coherent learning pathway. To work successfully, a network must be informed by research data, agree on and follow quality standards and focus on instruction, equity, and results. The work of networks should expand the knowledge and skill of participants while encouraging innovation and excellence.

A critical issue for sustainable networking is extending the net to new but related sectors so that existing resources are continually replenished from new sources. A critical factor in successful networks is the ability of members to take ownership and responsibility, and to ensure that motivation is maintained. Networks need the motivation of their members to operate, thrive, survive and expand.


## Networks and best practice

In developing networking to support best practice in second language acquisition, stakeholders can adopt a minimalist or maximalist position. In a minimal sense, it is sufficient to provide a forum so that initial contact, exchange of information and basic communications can take place and be maintained among the members. This kind of network provides evidence to funders and promoters (for example, the European Commission) that basic steps have been taken to extend learning and practice beyond the initial membership of the project group so that some impact is made on the field of endeavour focused on in the project.

In a maximal sense networking is seen as crucial in achieving impact, added value, sustainability and a knowledge base for generating new projects and initiatives. Such networks are driven by four key elements: innovation, adaptability, creativity and motivation. Creativity cannot occur in isolation. Networking is of no use and has no function unless it involves communication with other people. In professional networking, communication about innovation is more important than communication about use and application. This also highlights the role of power and effectiveness in understanding and accepting the impact of creativity and innovation. Disempowered individuals and professional communities may see innovation as a threat. Creativity in itself does not empower people: it depends upon social and economic structures that are responsive, engaged and open. Collaboration and the social dimension are validated by the approach taken in projects like NELLIP where effectiveness, cooperation, quality standards and interdependence have been highlighted by the partners.

Constructing viable and effective networks hinges on these networks going beyond mere compliance with funding requirements to the development of dynamic tools and ways of working that promote change and excellence.

# 3.3 ELL networking and school education

The European Language Label is currently operated simultaneously in over twenty countries in the European Union. It has been a major event in the policy initiatives and development of languages teaching throughout Europe. It has served as a powerful stimulus for schools to address and enhance the quality of second language teaching. It has acted as a strong focus when tackling language learning issues. In general terms, these issues include:

- Methodology
- Innovation
- Lateral links
- The quality of teaching
- Added value.

The ELL award was designed to recognize creative and innovative ways to improve the quality of language teaching and learning. This has a particular impact at the level of schools, where the teaching of languages is often determined by national curricula that are often based on traditional, more academic approaches to language learning and competence development.

The role of networking in the context of school education is to develop links between the key people involved in language teaching: teachers, pupils, policy makers and school administrators. The focus of networking is to develop and work on relevant themes and techniques to enhance language learning. Here the role of the European Language Label as both a resource and stimulus to achieve quality results and outcomes is important.

Winners of the ELL are usually selected on the basis of a number of factors. These may include excellence, innovation, imaginative technologies, creativity and the

ability of selected projects to serve as a model for others. Networking can be key to ensuring that as many language education projects as possible meet these criteria.

From the point of view of schools, the ELL provides rich opportunities to network by linking the issues and themes that feature in the original ELL application. Networking among existing and potential winners of the label (and indeed those who are initially unsuccessful) allows the development of a shared sense of potential in which the ELL serves to underline good practice and innovation. A key benefit of such networking is the sharing of information about the methods and techniques which can enhance second language learning in schools, whether at primary or secondary level. Primary schools, it seems, tend to have more flexibility in networking among ELL and other project initiatives, whereas secondary schools may be more constrained because of the demands of formal state examination systems and more proscribed curricula. However, previous experience of facilitated networking systems (such as the EU e-Twinning network) can serve as a useful model for ELL-related networking.

Collaborative teaching methods are greatly strengthened through the sharing of ELL winning experiences. Networks have been particularly successful in showcasing the impact and potential of advanced ICT support systems. The use of such resources for schools is currently being highlighted by the EU Open Discovery Space project, one of the largest of its kind in the world. A critical benefit of networking for ELL project personnel in schools is the exchange of expertise and best practice among teachers, which provides a collegial basis for current and future potential projects. Effective ELL networking also demonstrates to school administrators and policy makers that the ELL – both the process and the award – can create and foster creative development. Furthermore, networking encourages a strong sense of European identity where language learning and teaching methods, normally strictly part of national systems, can be shared and developed internationally.

Increased self-confidence and enhanced community recognition can in themselves foster wider recognition of the benefits of the ELL system for school stakeholders. The impact of various ELL award, for example, on those working with new immigrant or ethnic minority communities has highlighted the powerful role of ELL-acknowledged language initiatives in promoting enhanced social inclusion.

In sum, networking among personnel and programmes that have received the ELL award facilitates the sharing of techniques, methods and skills which all promote longer-term sustainable communities of best language learning practice.