

Second medium-term programme of activities 2004-2007

**Project C1 – CoCoCop**

**Cohesion of competences, coherence of principles**

**Exploring theories and designing materials for teacher education**

**Central workshop report 7/2004**

(Graz, Austria, 3-6 November 2004)

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

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

This report is accessible in English and in French on the ECML website: <http://www.ecml.at>

The Executive Director of the ECML should be informed about any full or partial translation of the report and a copy of the translation should be sent to the ECML for information.

**Contact address**

The Executive Director  
European Centre for Modern Languages  
Council of Europe  
Nikolaiplatz 4  
A-8020 Graz  
Austria  
e-mail : [information@ecml.at](mailto:information@ecml.at)

## Aims

The aims of the project were to

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

*(See Appendix 1: Project overview)*

In order to achieve these aims it was important to get an overview of what theories of language, learning and culture can be found in teacher education in different countries and to establish how curricula reflect such theories and principles. Prior to the workshop, the participants were asked first to publish a document on the project website ([www.ecml.at/interactive/PTopics.asp?f=3](http://www.ecml.at/interactive/PTopics.asp?f=3)) showing which theories and theorists significantly influence their teacher education programmes within the following areas: language, language learning and culture. Secondly, they were asked to compile a short collection of extracts from their teacher education curricula reflecting the above categories. Thirdly, the participants collected extracts of classroom materials used in lower and upper secondary schools to exemplify principles of language learning and culture.

## Focus

The documents published on the website formed the basis of the detailed planning of the workshop programme. The material was a useful starting point for analysing and identifying gaps in teacher education curricula and planning the details of the workshop content. The only common denominator of all the curricula examples was the Communicative Approach, in many cases misguidedly identified with Krashen (1991 etc.). This gave the obvious starting point for critical discussion at the beginning of the workshop. Input from participants and members of the coordinating team was also decided upon in more detail on the basis of the participants' presentations and on consideration of how a variety of learning goals and perspectives, linguistic, educational and intercultural, may be harmonised to achieve cohesion of competences. The collected material also formed the basis for analysis of materials and for critical discussions of current theories relevant to important aspects of language learning and teaching and their consequences for the design of materials.

## Content

The various teacher education curricula showed obvious weaknesses relating to recent theoretical development and to *The Common European Framework of Reference*, a fact that was emphasised also by some of the participants. The workshop presentations were consequently focused upon areas either missing in the majority of the published curricula documents or given too little emphasis according to participants. Before starting the individual presentations, a common theoretical stance of constructivism (Kelly 1953), social constructivism (Vygotsky 1978, 1991) and cognitivism (see Robinson 2001) was established as relevant to all the presentations. Extracts from two articles on constructivism (Roberts 1998, Butzkamm 2002) and an article on the influence of language learning theories on classroom practice (Newby 2003) had been published in the project forum before the workshop. The main input sessions focused upon the following topics:

- The role of theory in teacher education
- Learner autonomy
- Intercultural awareness and literature
- Pedagogical grammar
- Human rights and language learning
- Mediating between theory and practice

Each session was followed by group and plenary discussions developing principles related to materials design for teacher education as well as classroom materials, in order to link theory to practice.

### **The role of theory in teacher education**

‘Theory’ is a word which is not always popular with teachers. Nevertheless it was one which is at the core of this project, which is based on the premise that language teaching needs to be guided by clear principles deriving from appropriate theories. Whilst in previous times it was a relatively simple matter to find a clear link between specific learning theories and corresponding methods applied in language teaching, nowadays our profession draws on a range of diverse theories. It was the aim of this workshop not only to explore what theories might be appropriate to the various competences expected of learners, but also to consider how theories are mediated within teacher education courses.

### **Learner autonomy**

Participants had been given the opportunity to read a short article on learner autonomy (Fenner 2000) on the project website before the workshop. From a theoretical basis of social constructivism, Holec’s and Dam’s definitions of learner autonomy (Holec 1983, Dam 1995) were briefly presented. The controversial aspect of choice was discussed related to learners in school as well as to students in teacher education. Focus was put on the importance of reflection in FL learning processes and the role of mediation by teachers and peers. Both reflection and mediation were linked to social constructivist theories (Vygotsky 1991, Lantolf 2000).

### **Intercultural awareness and literature**

To familiarise the participants with the various concepts related to intercultural awareness, an article on the topic was published before the workshop on the project website (Fenner 2000). Based on definitions in *The Common European Framework of Reference* the presentation focused on the paradigmatic change from cultural knowledge to intercultural awareness and its consequences for language teaching. One important consequence is the focus on cognitive processes in an authentic dialogic setting, where both culture and developing intercultural awareness are defined as inherently dialogic concepts (Bakhtin 1981). Reading literature was presented as an important aspect of developing intercultural awareness. A receptionist definition of the reading process as dialogic communication was discussed, as were various requirements for such an approach to literary texts in FLL. Reflection and mediation are both central to a genuinely dialogic approach. In the presentation examples of students’ work were discussed.

## **Pedagogical grammar**

The teaching and learning of grammar, as found in many traditional classrooms, would seem to have little in common with principles underlying learner autonomy and intercultural awareness. However, a cognitive view of the learning process (e.g. Skehan 1998) and a communicative view of language use (Newby 2002) are both partly based on constructivist theories of language and learning. A cognitive/communicative model of language and learning acts as a springboard to a methodology which allows for the acquisition of grammar within the pedagogical framework provided by classroom-based learning while supporting the reflective and creative potential of learners.

## **Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Human rights and language learning**

One of the aims of the workshop was to consider how language-based aims can be integrated into social and educational aims. Examples of this were given in a presentation on recent developments in FLL, focusing on human rights and language education and content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Based on active participation, reflection and awareness, this approach seeks to go beyond developing language skills. Within a framework of understanding human rights and democracy, the approach stresses the development of cognitive skills, critical thinking, negotiation, and communication strategies. By enhancing the learner's awareness of values and attitudes, human rights and language education helps create a sense of inter-connectedness between the individual student and society.

## **Mediating between theory and practice**

After the workshop had focused on some of the theoretical underpinnings of recent developments in teacher education, we shifted the attention to how these theories manifest themselves in the teacher education classroom. First, participants were provided with a case study and training materials exemplifying how group dynamics theory (e.g. Ehrmann and Dörnyei 1998, Dörnyei and Murphey 2003) can be turned into reflective practice for student teachers who are carrying out their teaching practice in schools. The follow-up task provided participants with an opportunity to present the training tasks and/or materials they had designed for the exploitation of one of the three theoretical texts sent to them prior to the workshop. A rich and varied sequence of teacher education activities, as well as related materials, resulted from the group activities.

## **Follow-up work**

On the final day of the workshop groups were set up to plan projects for follow-up work (*See Appendix 2: Project details*). Groups were established to work on the following topics:

### **1. Learner Autonomy (6 participants)**

Research area: What hinders/promotes learner autonomy? Analysing curricula in 6 countries.

2. Developing a module for FL in teacher education on the following topics (9 participants)

- Learner autonomy
- Intercultural awareness
- Communicative grammar
- Vocabulary

3. Intercultural awareness and literature (2 participants)

- The relevance of literature and how to teach it?
- Theories of literature in FL teaching
- How to implement literature teaching for different age groups?
- How to incorporate literature in teacher education?

4. Human Rights (8 participants)

“Personal development for global citizenship through language learning”  
Developing a theoretical framework and designing teaching units.

The follow-up work will be carried out by May 1, 2005. Appropriate material will be compiled in a publication which will contain articles presenting an overview of current theories of language learning, outlining important principles relating to relevant competences and providing samples of materials to support language learning.

## References

- Butzkamm, W. (2002) *Psycholinguistik des Fremdsprachenunterrichts*. Tübingen: A. Francke, 58-59.
- Dam, L. (1995) *Learner Autonomy 3: Theory for Classroom Practice*. Dublin: Authentik.
- Dörnyei, Z. and T. Murphey (2003) *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ehrman M. E. and Z. Dörnyei (1998) *Interpersonal Dynamics in Second Language Education*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Fenner, A-B. (2000) “Learner Autonomy” in A-B Fenner & D. Newby (2000) *Approaches to Materials Design in European Textbooks: Implementing Principles of Authenticity, Learner Autonomy, Cultural Awareness*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Fenner, A-B. (2000) “Cultural Awareness” in A-B Fenner & D. Newby (2000) *Approaches to Materials Design in European Textbooks: Implementing Principles of Authenticity, Learner Autonomy, Cultural Awareness*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Holec, H. (1981) *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Kelly, G. (1963) *A Theory of Personality*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Krashen, S.D. (1981) *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lantolf, J.P. (2000) “Second Language Learning as a Mediated Process”. *Language Teaching* 33, pp.79-96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Newby, D. (2003) *A Cognitive+Communicative Theory of Pedagogical Grammar*. Karl-Franzens Universität Graz.
- Newby, D. (2003) “Theories of language learning and teaching and their influence on classroom practice” in F. Heyworth (ed.) *Challenges and Opportunities in Language Education. The Contributions of the ECML 2000-2003*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Roberts, Jon (1998) *Language Teacher Education*. London, New York: Arnold-member of Hodder Headline Group.
- Robinson, P. (ed.) (2001) *Cognition and Second Language Instruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skehan, P. (1998) *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vygotsky, Lev (1978) *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, Lev (1991) *Thought and Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.