

LA UNIVERSITAT A L'ESCOLA I L'ESCOLA A LA UNIVERSITAT: EL TREBALL COOPERATIU ENTRE EL PROFESSORAT UNIVERSITARI I EL PROFESSORAT DE PRIMÀRIA

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RESUM DE L'EXPERIÈNCIA

En el camp de la formació d'educadors, el professorat universitari s'ha d'afrontar al repte de contribuir a la innovació docent no tant sols en la seva pròpia aula sinó en les futures aules dels mestres en formació. Les noves propostes didàctiques que planteja han de tenir present la realitat de les aules de primària, a les quals ja no h està vinculat directament. Paral·lelament, el professorat de primària té el repte permanent d'actualitzar coneixements, sovent a través de propostes en les quals no és un agent directe de la seva formació sinó que la rep d'un expert aliè al centre. En la nostra comunicació volem narrar l'experiència viscuda en la marc d'un projecte europeu (Comissió Europea: Project 118762-CP-1-2004-1-NL-Comenius-C2.1) que ha permès que professionals de l'educació de diferents països i d'àmbits dins un mateix estat aprenguessin conjuntament a crear recursos didàctics per afavorir l'aprenentatge d'una llengua estrangera a través de la creació de projectes cooperatius entre escoles europees mitjançant l'ús de les TIC. En el nostre cas, els alumnes universitaris han pogut entrar en les classes virtuals de les escoles de primària catalanes per veure com s'organitza l'aprenentatge i, al mateix temps, alguns dels productes creats pels nens han servit de material de suport als casos que els universitaris han hagut de resoldre com a part del seu procés d'aprenentatge. A més, els alumnes de primària han pogut comprovar que allò que fan a l'aula té una utilitat real ja que el destinatari final no és només el seu mestre sinó que altres alumnes i altres mestres també se'n beneficien, fet que contribueix a donar sentit a les propostes d'aula.

ABSTRACT

In the area of teacher training, university educators must face the challenge of contributing to the innovative teaching practices. This refers not only to innovation their own classroom but also ensuring that innovative practices are transferred to the classrooms of future teachers. This implies that new didactic proposals must be applicable within the actual reality of primary education. Likewise, primary education teachers continually face new challenges of renovating their own knowledge and practice in order to meet with the many changes and subsequent challenges occurring both inside and outside their classroom. In our presentation we outline and discuss experiences and outcomes of a European project (European Commission: Project 118762-CP-1-2004-1-NL-Comenius-C2.1). The project was

designed to allow different educational agents, from diverse countries and areas of expertise, to jointly create collaborative projects between distanced European partners, employing ICT tools and platforms. In our particular case, the teacher trainees studying at our faculty were able to observe the organisation of the primary education students' learning process while at the same time; the output produced by the primary education students was used as a resource for case studies. Furthermore, the primary education students involved in the collaborative projects were able to see for themselves how the knowledge learnt in class had a real purpose, as the knowledge was used to communicate with students and partners outside of their own classroom.

PARAULES CLAU

noves tecnologies, aprenentatge cooperatiu, 'telecollaboration'

ÀMBIT GENERAL D'INTERÈS DE LA INNOVACIÓ

La nostra experiència pot interessar als formadors de mestres perquè proporciona elements de reflexió sobre com ha de ser el treball cooperatiu entre l'escola i la universitat per tal de garantir la innovació docent en ambdós àmbits educatius.

DESENVOLUPAMENT

1. Objectius

The idea of collaboration, especially international collaboration, is a powerful means of teaching a language through genuine language use. With the increase of access to new technologies in the classroom, the opportunities and possibilities these provide to design, set up and implement collaborative e-learning projects is evident. Indeed, the use of new technologies in education is becoming more common nowadays, nonetheless, there are still worrying gaps between theory and practice, in as much as teacher training is concerned. As Hubbard and Levy (2006) point out in their book on teacher competencies needed to embed Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in foreign language teaching, teachers need to not only know how to work with technology effectively now but also to be prepared to adapt positively to the inevitable innovations that will come during their professional careers.

With this in mind, the project entitled Moderating Intercultural Communication and Language Learning (MiCaLL), was designed to promote the development of teacher and student teacher competences in the area of project-based online language teaching and learning; with a special focus on telecollaboration. It should be noted that telecollaboration is understood here within the area of education and as entailing all types of learning activities that employ the wide variety of on-line communication tools available through the Internet (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). This meant providing an environment for empirical learning for all the partners involved: student teachers, primary teachers, teacher trainers and project partners. The MiCaLL pedagogical approach to language teacher education was to provide language learning experiences which teachers and trainees could link to personal reflection and action research on designing, managing and evaluating e-projects in school practice.

2. Descripció del treball

In the first year of the three-year project, The MiCaLL project partners developed a Web portal and project course materials aimed at offering experiential learning opportunities to both the student teachers and the teachers involved in the project. These opportunities -which included online virtual workshops on different ICT tools (e.g. weblogs, wikipages, chat platforms, webquests, forums), individual and virtual

worksites to experiment with different formats, and virtual sites for pilot projects between partners - allowed the participants a period of time to develop competencies relevant for network-based language learning projects.

In the second year of the project, the schools and education faculties began their full-fledged collaborative efforts (a total of 12 schools and faculties were set up in dyads with the aim of developing six telecollaborative projects). Output from periodic revision, assessment and feedback of the projects was compiled as a first draft of a second online workshop on telecollaborative projects and was also used as the basis for the first draft of a teacher's handbook on Telecollaboration. All materials produced were based on the partners' experiences in tandem school projects, thus offering insight into the preparation and co-teaching of self-designed classroom projects, including, but not limited to how to choose the appropriate technologies for specific tasks and how to adapt existing instructional materials to the project design.

In the third year of the project, the partnered schools and faculties, revised and fine-tuned their projects and then further elaborated and developed them to include more students and teacher trainees. International teacher exchange and trainee exchange accompanied this phase of the project and promoted more opportunities for pupils, teachers and trainees to comprehend the increased motivation of language use when it is purpose-based and contextualised with authentic communicative events. The output stemming from the continued assessment and feedback from the partners was channelled into the revising of the teachers' handbook and was used to develop another online virtual workshop about Telecollaboration. This workshop was offered on an international level and was opened up to participants outside of the partner membership.

3. Metodologia

By working in the portal in co-authored, co-directed school projects, the MICaLL partners were given the opportunity to bring personal and professional experience to the fore and thus reflect on the process of designing, managing and evaluating network-based projects in school practice. In this way, the different experiential phases were incorporated into the telecollaborative efforts, and over the three year period of the coordinated projects, the experience was used and expanded in a number of ways.

For instance, intercultural collaboration was organised by setting up tasks for distributed teams (between partners at primary and secondary school level and teacher training faculties) involving formats such as blogging, wiki pages and WebQuests. Furthermore, in teacher-education methodology courses, students were trained to apply project design criteria (criteria which was later integrated into the handbook) when developing network-based projects for the language classroom. Teachers, trainers and trainees learnt how to create tasks for distributed learners' teams and try out materials and practise moderating with their classes during school practice.

At the level of Initial Teacher Training, teacher trainees were required to use the MICaLL portal and materials, not only for their coursework in the faculty classes but also as part of their own practice teaching in the schools. Trainees were expected to create online language learning materials that engaged their students in learning through what could be termed an 'inquiry process' structured around tasks that required knowledge-building and reflection. The project design criteria given to the students as a framework for their project design highlighted the need for:

- Recognition of learner's inherent desire to learn (thus putting them at the centre of the learning process)
- Taking the learner seriously and believing in their ability to do tasks
- Making the project central to the curriculum (albeit as trainees they were limited in their capacity to do so)
- Using tasks or questions that 'provoke' in-depth exploration of authentic material and issues
- Including and integrating technology as a tool for learning and self-management
- Including resources for the learners to be able to solve problems and do reasoning
- Providing materials and guidelines for feedback and self-reflection
- Encouraging work in groups on an international basis (if possible)

The trainees' project design was made available to the schools where they were doing their practice teaching, thus increasing the circle of impact of the materials, just as the trainees were directly involved in the design and implementation of the dyadic projects of the partners where they were doing their practice teaching. (In some cases, trainees from the partner institutions visited the partner schools as is shown in the 'Project News' screenshot shown in figure 1 below).

Fig. 1 Screenshot of teacher trainee exchange

Teacher Trainee Exchange

Programme of exchange within MICaLL

Teacher Trainees involved in MICaLL project take part in exchange

During the month of May, Czech teacher trainees spent time in Holland (Utrecht) and Spain (Castellar del Vallès and Moià) getting to know their partner schools first hand. These visits follow two previous visits by Spanish teacher trainees to Holland (Utrecht) and the Czech Republic (Usti nad Labem) in January of 2005 and January of 2006.

The teacher trainees were completely and intensively integrated into the school programmes during their stay. Some of the activities carried out include English workshops, helping with the different MICaLL projects, interviewing with the children involved in the projects so that they could get first-hand knowledge of their partner schools and one trainee even participated in a school field trip.

Post-stay evaluation from the host teachers has been very positive and enthusiastic. They appreciated the open and friendly attitudes of the trainees staying with them and especially valued the chance for their students to get to know someone from their partner country more personally.



Additionally, material developed by the primary schools was used as examples of good practice and as a basis for case studies in their Methodology classes at the teaching faculties involved in the project.

On the level of continued teacher education, the teachers involved in the project were encouraged to try out various didactical procedures applied through various network-based formats to better comprehend how they could be efficiently integrated into collaborative language learning activities. By focusing on interaction between distributed language learners, the teachers were encouraged to design and develop activities that triggered purposeful communication and authentic language use.

As for teacher training beyond the membership of the project, as mentioned earlier evaluation data and case studies from these experiences provided further input to the adaptation (or 'fine-tuning') of the projects during different phases of the projects as well as producing relevant content for the final course module and handbook. This material was also used for the production of a final online course module that could be used by the partner members in their countries and as a collaborative online module, carried out through the portal, which now serves as the basis for a Comenius Inservice Course to be offered 2008-2009. The entry interface is shown in figure 2.

Fig. 2 Online Telecollaborative Workshop

contents view edit add new item ▼ state: visible ▼

[Welcome Message](#) | [Information](#) | [Outline of workshop](#) | [Tasks](#) | [Resources](#) | [Conclusion](#) |

WELCOME!

Frequently teachers see the Web as a great place to both teach and learn. In fact, many teachers have tried different ways to integrate the use of the Internet in their teaching. One aspect which is proving to be worth exploring is the use of the Internet for telecollaboration, that is, collaboration through different Internet formats with distanced partners.

What are the different stages needed for carrying out an online project with a partner? Are there essential steps which should not be skipped? What issues can emerge? How can you deal with them? These are some of the questions you will be addressing as you work your way

Implementation Process

Indubitably, MICaLL encompassed a complex project design (a macro-project providing the framework for micro-projects which, in turn, provided essential input to the final output of the macro-project (input such as field-tested experiences, portal content, didactic material, research data and case studies). The complexity of the overall project was relevant to the final analysis of the project - it is worthwhile to outline this complexity here. The levels and roles of the different partners meant that there was interaction and impact in various circumstances, e.g.

teacher educators, student teachers, school teachers, and primary and secondary pupils. This also implied that the project held quite ambitious goals, mainly that of developing new pedagogy emerging from the above-mentioned interactions.

In fact there was triple innovation involved: new pedagogic approach (task based language learning), new tools, and new teaching skills (task design, classroom management (coaching groupwork, debriefing). Moreover, the collaborative activities which were carried out offered a rich learning environment for the development of language skills and intercultural communicative competence for the students involved; and additionally, it fomented, on the whole, the related competences of the teachers and trainers in areas of project management, language teaching through network-based projects and intercultural communication.

For teachers and trainees, this was achieved through learning by doing, enabling 'design & try-out & evaluate'-sequences, on-the-job elements promoting reflection and feedback (also in networks of teachers), collaboration between schools and teacher education organisations and universities (van Eck et al., 2001). Following this experiment based reflection, the participants further explored the implications of running educational pilots in their schools (curriculum, themes, technology and time constraints e.g. for synchronous activities etc.) through detailed correspondence between the twinned partners.

For the primary and secondary students indirectly involved in MICaLL, the mini-projects included transversal topics such as environment protection and intercultural awareness through self-reflection about their individual towns and schools. An example of acquisition of transversal knowledge (language and content) can be seen in the next two figures that show an interactive weblog constructed by Spanish and Czech primary education students to discuss environmental issues.

Fig 3 Interactive blog for environmental discussion (frontpage)

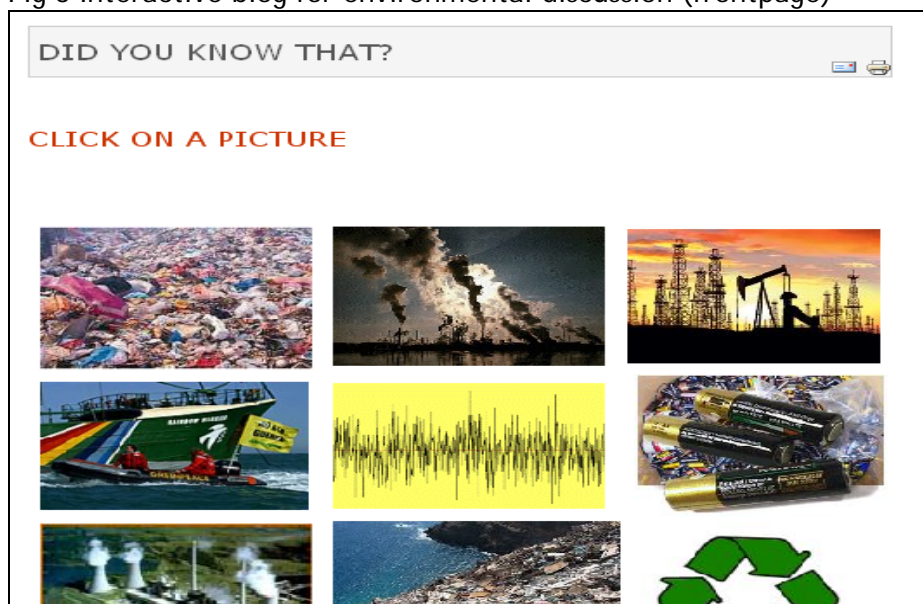



Fig. 4 International partners discuss recycling batteries



Batteries are an expensive and dangerous energy source. They contain toxic and pollutant material. Recycling batteries is very expensive.

Created by [mgarcia](#)
Last modified 2007-03-08 12:48 AM

[add comment](#)

Rechargeable batteries
Posted by [ihosta](#) at 2007-03-19 07:31 PM

In the school, we use rechargeable batteries. It's a good idea!

[reply to this](#) [remove this discussion](#)

Replies to this comment

[We do too!](#) (Posted by [mdooly](#) at 2007-03-21 08:43 PM)

Cheaper or more expensive?
Posted by [cperez](#) at 2007-03-19 07:43 PM

In Spain, rechargeable batteries are much more expensive than non-rechargeable. But they can be recharged 1000 times and the appliance we need to charge uses not much electricity. So we can say that rechargeable batteries are, at the end, much more cheaper.

[reply to this](#) [remove this discussion](#)

By providing the opportunity for transversal knowledge content, integration of learning processes of different discourse communities and the role of socio-constructivist learning can be brought into play.

Van Lier (1996) highlighted the role of social interaction in the classroom wherein learning is an interdependent, jointly negotiated activity. This emphasizes the negotiated meaning stemming from the learning process. It also emphasizes the learning process as much as the learning outcomes and implies that both the teacher and learners involved in the process will be, in part at least, responsible for the emerging discourse. (Dooly, forthcoming)

On a similar note, interdependent, transversal learning processes were integrated into the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) level whenever possible. For instance, the teacher trainers tried out the adapted version of the concept materials with their students by including them in their regular methodology courses. Thus, at the level of initial teacher training, the MICaLL module was successfully integrated into an existing course in at least two of the four Education faculties involved in the project. This meant that education students passing through the courses (an estimated 450 students) were able to increase their competences in network-based language teaching and learning, based on the materials and experiences of the micro-projects in MICaLL.

4. Resultats

In the first phase of the micro-projects, the focus was principally on preparatory activities concerning project team development, defining of module contents and production planning, affiliate local school network development; training in the use

of the portal and initial experimentation with the relevant formats (Chat, WebQuest, Weblogging and Wiki pages). Face-to-face meetings were held which allowed the partners to begin planning and outlining their collaboration, having become familiar with the technology and methodology to be employed.

Post-evaluation of the first phase of the micro-projects revealed the need for expanding the partnership, due to insufficient matches in age groups, target language and competence levels. This led to arrangements to two new teacher education organisations in Germany and Austria, along with their affiliate schools. Moreover, an American university partner participated with his students in one of the courses of the Spanish partner. This resulted in more diversity in the partnership and a wider range for intercultural interaction.

However, there were other inherent problems which also emerged in the evaluation. Considering the fact that many participants reported to have only limited computer skills, extra time was required to allow the participants to familiarise themselves with the new web tools and related pedagogical ideas. This implied that their capability to collectively designing tasks for future pupil projects early on in the project was unrealistic; likewise the impact of their lack of experience in telecollaboration had been underestimated.

Eventually, the teachers became quite active in the portal, after becoming more and more familiar with it, with an average of some 5000 visits per month. Yet, first reactions and focus group reports indicate that the concept '*web portal*' and the related functionality offered to individual members in personal workspaces was new to most users. Many of them reported feeling more comfortable with websites for information extraction and therefore needed time to get accustomed to the idea of being personally 'in the driving seat'. The extent of available functionality and spatial orientation seemed to be the most problematic issues although further confirmation is needed from the results of the usability research. Steps were taken by the teacher trainers (as coordinating partners) in each country to help the teachers become more comfortable and productive in the portal.

In the second phase of the micro-projects, most of the dyads began to collaborate more efficiently and to accomplish their mutually established goals. In part, this was due to the availability of the newly developed materials and portal content dealing with telecollaboration, but in a large part, their increased productivity was due to their increased confidence in their own competences in setting up network-based learning situations. The teachers were also more experienced and better equipped to design, implement and assess their telecollaborative projects. The experience indicated that more careful training seems to be needed before students and school teachers master skills involved in project based teaching. Planning and communication proved to be key in successful implementation. The dyads who were able to refine their communication channels and established sustained, continuous interaction improved their output and the final projects were quite successful.

Between their pilot projects and the second phase of the projects, the teachers had time for reflection and in many cases, their input coincided.

- Inflexibility in their plans and curriculum restraints complicated their ability to collaborate with partners on an international level
- Lack of fluidity and continuity in communication created problems in the implementation of the pilot projects
- The projects were not designed with enough collaborative activities. The teachers realised that they had not designed the projects to include the others'

- beyond their own classroom walls.
- The teachers recognised that they had not considered their time management sufficiently
- Clear aims, not only in language learning but in intercultural communication, needed to be adapted to the learners' ages.
- The teachers had not outlined their mutual goals in the project design adequately and this created uncertainty and confusion in the implementation

These teachers' observations highlighted the fact that many times, when thinking about or discussing a collaborative online project, the collaborative process *between the educators* is ignored or does not receive as much attention to planning as the student interaction, when it is in fact, one of the essential factors for setting up and implementing effective network-based collaboration between classes. Indeed, it seems almost ironic that getting the students to work with others located in another country is quite often the easy part - but the teachers have a hard time collaborating with their counterpart! The need for training in collaborative work, the need for careful planning and negotiation, the need for commitment from the participants and so on is as applicable to the partner teachers as it is to the learners involved in the project, perhaps even more so.

CONCLUSIONS

There were indications that the teachers' level of competence in network-based project coordination was improved through their experiences in MICaLL. The teachers began to integrate innovative trends in modern languages teaching pedagogy and research, based on constructivist, sociocultural approaches such as (post) communicative, collaborative and content and task-based language learning (Nunan, 2004: 6-16). They explored new ways to use the computers that moved beyond the more traditional tutorial role towards a more interactional role.

In some cases, the teachers were able to integrate cross-curricular, content-based language learning (commonly known as CLIL) into their microproject, as was the case of the environmental project which integrated English classes with the Natural Science class.

The results of the MICaLL project foreground the technological skills of ICT tools and know-how of intercultural competence and negotiation needed for online collaboration. Evaluation and results of the three-year process highlighted the necessity of providing teachers with competences for integrating these skills into their telecollaboration plans.

Moreover, teachers need to serve as a model for collaboration with their partners - this will mean negotiating the activities, the design of the project, the methods, the assessment, the timetable and deadlines, etc - even before the project begins; as outlined in the project design tool kit referred to earlier. In short, carrying out an online collaborative learning project requires the very same skills that the teaching partners wish to inculcate their students in, resulting in a learning experience for everyone involved.

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ENLLAÇOS D'INTERÈS

<http://micall.net/>