

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
PESTALOZZI PROGRAMME

REPORT

European Workshop

*How to teach and learn a country's official language for those with
a different mother-tongue:*

a socio-cultural inclusion approach

CoE 2009 0401-0404 Portugal

Caparide, S. João do Estoril (Portugal)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Aims of the workshop
3. Participants
4. Support documentation
5. Evaluation
6. Conclusion

1. INTRODUCTION

The workshop of the Council of Europe, couched within the Pestalozzi Programme, entitled “How to teach and learn a country’s official language for those with a different mother tongue: a socio-cultural inclusion approach” took place in Caparide, S. João do Estoril, Portugal, from April 1st to 4th 2009.

The subject of this workshop is opportune and pointed given the new waves of immigration in Europe and the growing mobility of citizens within the European space, as well as the recent awareness that some countries and educational systems have been developing that foreigner students must be integrated in schools and taught the official languages in order to promote their literacy, their social inclusion and academic success.

In several countries, new legislation has been created in order for schools and teachers to integrate these new populations, but teachers still feel uncomfortable about dealing with a reality that is new for many of them, and have to fight many obstacles even inside their schools in order to reach a good integration for foreign students.

The choice of Portugal as a host country for this workshop is just natural, since this country underwent two recent changes. On the one hand, it turned from a country of emigration into a country of immigration. On the other hand, the educational system became aware that many students did not achieve academic success because of their linguistic profile (this was ignored for many years, particularly with respect to Capeverdean communities, which were in schools since the early seventies). This recent and sudden change created the need for schools to respond to the request to provide L2 classes to non-native speakers and to develop strategies to integrate them in such a way that they are able to follow up their schoolmates. In many schools, teachers required help and in-service training. The massive number of applications for this workshop witnesses the great need felt by Portuguese teachers.

The workshop was organized by the Directorate-General for Human Resources in Education (DGRHE), of the Portuguese Ministry of Education.

It was established by the organizing body that the workshop should provide the participants with the opportunity to develop a knowledge based on methods that balance well cultural factors and linguistic issues. This balance between linguistic and socio-cultural information was the main guideline for making up the program of the workshop.

2. AIMS OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop aimed at attaining the following goals:

- a) To develop knowledge on the role of language awareness in the schools and in the classroom;
- b) To develop knowledge on the need of strengthening teachers' linguistic training for diversity and tolerance;
- c) To develop knowledge on different methodologies used for teaching foreign languages, with the necessary adaptations vis-à-vis the variables that influence the choices to be made;
- d) To make sure that all participants get acquainted with reference documentation and legal documents that constitute the reference documentation for defining policies for teaching the schooling languages in each participant's country;
- e) To create time and space for collaborative learning, through debates and workgroups in which participants are asked to share experiences, debate learning scenarios, and propose solutions for the problems at stake;
- f) To create a network of teachers who become aware of the need to disseminate the knowledge created during the workshop.

In order to reach these goals, the workshop was organized in plenary sessions, followed by debate, and in working group sessions, in which the participants had to work in small groups. Originally, a visit to a school was planned, but since the dates of the workshop coincided with Easter Break, and it turned out to be difficult to have students in the school, teachers leading an ongoing project on bilingual education in the school we intended to visit were invited to come and present the results of this project.

3. PARTICIPANTS

The workshop had thirty selected participants, coming from eleven countries (Estonia, France, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey). Besides the selected participants, the organizing body invited some educational professionals from different institutions.

The full list of participants is attached to the present report.

It could be observed during the workshop that the main goal of attaining a balanced group with diverse teaching experiences, but with enough robust background in order to develop a solid spirit of collaborative learning was achieved. All participants actively engaged in the discussions, participated in a very lively manner in the debates and in the working groups, and spontaneously adhered to the work proposals. Professor Mercè Bernaus played an important role in breaking the ice between the participants, but it was clear that all participants were eager to share experiences and to learn from one another. Also, it was evident that most participants had a high level of commitment to the success of the workshop, and were expecting to learn from the activities. Almost all participants did the preparatory works and readings on time, and studied the documentation as requested, which made sure that everyone knew exactly what was presupposed for the beginning of the workshop.

In preparing the working groups, it was made sure that for each assignment the participants were re-organized in new groups, that the same nationalities were not represented in the same groups, and that the spokesperson in each group varied in such a way that all members had to take on this function.



4. SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION

Besides all kinds of practical information regarding the workshop, the organizing body was concerned about establishing common ground knowledge for initiating the discussions and the debates during the sessions. In particular, it became evident while putting up the program that all participants should be acquainted with the following documents:

- a) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (available at http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/CADRE_EN.asp#TopOfPage)
- b) Recommendation CM/Rec (2008)7 concerning the use of the CEFR (available at www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc)

Additionally, the participants were asked to read the relevant legislation of their National Education Authorities concerning the teaching of official language(s) to non-native speakers. In the case of the Portuguese participants, specific instructions were given about which documents should be read.

In order to ensure that the participants actually read the official documents in a critical way, they were asked to prepare a three-page synthesis of the official documents, which should be handed in before the workshop, wherein they should reflect if and how the recommendations of the two documents listed above are incorporated in the local orientations.

An online platform was created to make sure that all documents created for the workshop became available to the participants. All documents were made available on the platform immediately after the presentations, so that they could be worked with by the participants in the subsequent working group sessions at the workshop.

5. EVALUATION

Taking into consideration the reports handed in by the participants and the workshop evaluation form, their degree of satisfaction was very high. Besides measuring the degree of satisfaction, it was important to understand to what extent the aims of the workshop were achieved.

The results of the working groups and the participants' reports revealed that the trainees incorporated the notions transmitted by the training team in an adequate manner, namely:

- The need to develop an attitude of respect for diversity in general, and for students' L1s in particular;
- The need to encourage the development of schools as plurilingual spaces;
- The need to implement activities developing language awareness in the classroom and in the school communities;
- The need to strengthen their own linguistic knowledge in terms of teaching methodologies and as language teachers.

The balance between theoretical and applied work was successfully achieved, although in the second day, a delay in the working group presentations made one of the plenary sessions last a bit longer than the others. Otherwise, there was an even distribution of lectures and collaborative work. Several participants mention that they wish the workshop had lasted one more day, so that there could be more time for the working groups. Likewise, it is mentioned

that more workshops about this topic should be organized so that more teachers have access to this information.

Methodologically, the aims of the workshop appear to have been achieved. The participants report to have learnt from their peers, from the discussions, and from the work developed in groups.

The presentation of the project “Bilingual Classes” was referred by many participants as a very positive aspect of the workshop, although some of the foreigners would have liked to have visited local schools.

It remains to be seen whether the participants will be able to act as multipliers and disseminate the results of the workshop. So far, there are promising intentions to write pieces in local newspapers and magazines, to organize local workshops, to promote training sessions for their fellow teachers in their schools, and to implement many of the activities presented and created during the workshop. Likewise, many participants manifested their will to keep in touch and keep up the collaborative work initiated during this week.

6. CONCLUSION

As reported, the workshop’s aims appear to have been attained to a large extent. Initiatives of this type may be fruitful and effective in the development of a culture of respect for plurilingualism, and of strategies to improve teachers’ methods to teach official languages in a perspective that integrates students and takes into account their individual and sociolinguistic profiles.

The methodologies inherent to the Pestalozzi Programme proved very effective in the sense that the pillars for developing collaborative learning were essential for the success of the workshop. Without the initiatives inherent to this methodology, the results of the workshop would definitely have been less proficuous.