Minutes of EEPG Language Network Meeting, 5-6 May 2005, in Plovdiv

(Secretary of the minutes for 5th May: Selja Saarialho, Otava, Finland)

Thursday 5th May:

Chair of Session – Yordan Kosturkov

- Mr Yordan Kostrukov opened the conference.
- A round of introductions by everybody present was made.
- Mrs Nadya Furnadzhieva, the manager and owner of Lettera Publishers, gave a welcoming speech in which she gave a short history of Plovdiv and stressed the universal significance of language teaching.
- Mr Yordan Kostrukov announced a change in the programme for the day: Mr Preben Späth had been taken to hospital and his presentation was postponed till Friday.
- Mr Yordan Kostrukov delivered a short introduction to Lettera Publishing House. More information available in the folder handed out to all the participants.

1. Standards in Foreign Language Teaching in Bulgaria, Chavdar Zdravchev, Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria

(Speech available in the conference folder.)

- Mr Zdravchev gave a detailed presentation of the Bulgarian educational system and the current standards in foreign language teaching.
- The number of hours (18 hours a week in grade 8 with intensive foreign language training) allotted to language teaching at the so called specialised schools with admission after grade 7 (c. 26 500 pupils at 510 schools) raised a discussion among the participants.
- In reference to the Common European Framework, the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria is planning to revise the foreign language standards and set them in full conformity with the levels of the CEF.

2. Presentation of the multimedia product "Bulgaran for Foreigners", prof. Lilyana Grozdanova

- Lettera is the coordinating institution of the project - Multimedia course "Bulgaran for Foreigners" – under Lingua 2 action of the Socrates programme, with the following partners: Westminster University, United Kingdom; University of Ghent, Belgium; University of Prague, Czech Republic; University of Aix-en-Provence, France; National Institute of Education, Sofia, Bulgaria; Plovdiv University, Bulgaria; EDGE Project Design GmbH, Vienna, Austria; Verax – a multimedia company – Sofia, Bulgaria.
- The project has an ambitious aim to develop multimedia materials for teaching Bulgaran and self-study that have not been produced so far.
- The mutual work of authors, specialists of language teaching, and famous Bulgaran artists and poets contributes to the modern approach to teaching Bulgaran and is a guarantee itself for a high quality product. The authors managed to create an interesting and communicative self-teacher, where the main lexis, included in various everyday topics, is developed in cartoons and interactive exercises.
• The course structure is clearly defined and centered round a plot with recurrent characters who react in different situations chosen to follow the natural circumstances that arise from a first visit to a foreign country. Levels A1 + A2 are presented in 24 units. There are 8 revisions named Communication + after every 3 unit, 8 Phonetic sections, 8 tests for self-evaluation and 3 links, where the learners could find additional cultural information and grammar.
• The topics of the Revision lessons are presented in a video film, shot under the guidance of Adam Duncan, featuring a young man coming to Bulgaria to buy a house for himself.
• The products will be adapted into five languages – English, German, French, Flemish, Czech.
• The set consists of:
  – CD-ROMs
  – a manual

3. How to Create Cost-effective Language Support Material?, Adam Duncan

• Mr Duncan is the producer of the Bulgarian for Foreigners video. He has been working on video in language teaching for a long time and has produced videos and DVDs for twenty-one language publishers in different parts of the world.
• According to Mr Duncan, making videos is not as expensive as publishers think. He presented different ways of commissioning multimedia language products:
  Option 1: Using a local production company (budget transparency, access to specialist scripting and filming skills)
  Option 2: Employing language media specialists
  Option 3: In-house production (Editorial control, administrative costs)

• Mr Duncan stressed the importance of pre-production in language teaching multimedia.
• The video is the first attempt in Bulgaria to do a product on the lines of the CEF. The programme covers levels A1-A2.

4. Implementation of the CEF in the member countries

Cedric Sherratt, Cornelsen, Germany

• In Germany there are 16 states all autonomous in education, 16 Ministers of education, different curricula for each state and school form
• Influence of the CEF in Germany: Education Ministers Conference (KMK) took following decision in Dec. 2003:
  - National standards for the end of Secondary School to be established
  - Standards established in foreign languages
  - Every state will put the standard in their curricula (in some way)
  - Leaving exams to be linked to the CEF
    Hauptschule (low level school) leaving exam (age 16): B1
    Realschule (middle level school) B1+
    Gymnasium (grammar school) (age 18): B2
• Exams up to now have typically had little or no oral exam.
• Implementing standards means more testing.
• Trends:
  - Centralised standardised tests
  - Increase in final exams
  - Increase in oral exams
  - Greater weight on communicative skills

Mathias Jost, Koolibri, Estonia

• In Estonia developments in the educational system have been affected by the constant changes in Government.
• CEF has been translated into Estonian.
• In the present curriculum, B2 target in first and second foreign language
• Textbooks in Estonia influenced more by the national curriculum than by the CEF as of today.
• Matthias finds the question of students’ self-evaluation important: aspect of the CEF that should be stressed more than it is now.

Tomas Hausner, Fraus Publishing House, Czech Republic

• Being a new member, Tomas handed out material on Fraus and gave a brief introduction to the Publishing House
• In the Czech Republic, Ministry of Education is trying to introduce a new curriculum for ages 3-19.
  - Old curriculum topic-oriented, not skills-oriented
• The Ministry is to give general educational programmes, each school is to develop their own programme on the lines of the general programme
• The Ministry has sent documents to schools with guidelines on how to reorganise teaching.
• New programme to come into effect in 2012.
• Target levels of the new programme:
  - 3rd grade, first foreign language: A2
  - 7th grade, second foreign language: A1
• Implementation of CEF slow in process in the country due to lack of political will and pedagogical skills.

(Secretary of the minutes for 6th May: Cedric Sherratt, Cornelsen Verlag, Germany)

Friday 6th May:

Presentation by Tone Holt Nielsen, Gyldendal, Norway

Tone described the political background in Norway and stressed the following current factors:
  - Two foreign languages are obligatory in schools
  - A very practical approach to languages is taken
  - Increasing importance of CLIL
  - Lifelong learning
  - Not enough teachers for subject teaching in foreign languages
  - Focus on basic skills
CEF forms the background to national standards and curriculum but has not been explicitly adopted.

- The "Can do" project: implementation in self-assessment
- National tests in major subjects at age of sixteen
- Skills areas: the main area for testing systems.
- Reading test, for example, is done online and the assessment is based on CEF.
- Teachers are being trained in the CEF in order to be able to assess better.
- Sliding scales between a A-B-C attainment levels of the CEF.
- All the tests are based on the Can do project.
- Cooperation between Baltiv states
- Time consuming but otherwise the experience with portfolio is positive.

Implications for publishing:
- Hopes that there will be more detailed plans this summer
- Suggestions for the portfolio will be made increasingly
- Books with dummy tests – format to practice based on CEF Can do project

Question raised in discussion:
Relevance of portfolio and relevance of awareness raising?
Preben pointed out that self-assessment has been made available on the web
www.dialang.org

Does it make sense for publishers to publish portfolio frameworks?
This question received different responses from country to country.

Presentation by Tomas Hausner, FRAUS, Czech Republic

In implementing essential features from the CEF, FRAUS have at this time chosen a middle path for textbook publishers: Using existing book material updated and rearranged to match the CEF levels.
The new series for lower secondary schools Way to Win is based on the Cornelsen EG 2000 series, which in its adapted form for the Czech Republic covers the first four years (grades 6-9) of secondary school and also grammar schools grades 1-4. The age range in both school forms is 12-16. Volume 1 and accompanying materials will be published in the summer of 2005.

Way to Win ist thus the most up to date textbook for the Czech Republic and is based on the Czech General Education Programme.
The main concept of the course is the development of key competences.
(Details of the Way to Win series are listed in the handout supplied by Tomas. He will also supply the ppt documentation on request by mail.)
Interdisciplinary learning (CLIL) is an essential feature of the course. Provisions for can do self-assessment with a view to portfolio work are also included. Several Czech publishers already offer their own portfolios for sale.
The authenticity of the material is a key selling argument in the Czech Republic.
Other key features:
Warm up pages to each unit
Task-oriented approach
Look-back grammar references
Sidebars with guides to other subjects. CLIL tasks featured here.
My Portfolio feature: review on the lines of I can ...

Presentation by Chris Bisschops, the Netherlands

Representing International Publishing Services (IPS)
Details of the IPS services are to be found under
Website www.i-publishingservices.com
When using the website please follow these steps to gain access:

User name: demo
Password: ipsdemo04

IPS is a B2B company for FL publishing companies, mainly E, G, F, Sp, which works in close cooperation with Nordquist productions (Johann Nordquist).
People and studios available on the website.
Nordquist: Audio productions to master: pre-production, recording, editing
IPS: Multimedia

Main services on offer are:

- **i-catcher: online interactive web video magazine**
- **newstickers:** on two levels for company websites
- **hitticker:** monthly songs from the charts (newly recorded with karaoke version, not original artists)
- **Multimedia videos on demand:** Commissioned video work for publishers. Short videos: 2-3 minutes.
- **Educational games:** web-based and flash-based
- **List of songs** (also seasonally based).
- **Phototo productions:** Commissioned photography. Price tags of tomatoes. High res digital photography. Local photography units.
- **Listening exercises.**

**i-catcher demonstration**
2-3 minute videos: Example: *Justin and his business idea for a gap year.*
Script runs underneath (with or without subtitles)
Comprehension questions follow. Feedback on negative answers with zipback to relevant spot on video.
Activity: Discussion, finding information, task-based project, also web-based.
Chat support at certain times. Interactive component.
Chat is monitored: Ingoing and outgoing questions and answers are monitored.
Three weeks online in month, last week chat.
Preview with prequestions.
i-catcher sold on subscription basis on a one-company per country basis.
Customised versions also possible due to online editing environment. For example: L1 subtitles.

**Newsticker**
Online news serve for websites. Pasted on point of attraction.
Two levels with comprehension questions and sound recording of the article.
Material stays available and are sent to clients as booklets.

**Hitticker**  
Song selection.  
The whole rights issue is taken care of.  
Downloaded onto cached version.

**Educational games**  
Snake for example. Educational version.  
Fault evokes a question. Question editor is supplied: Customised versions.  
Series of eight web games.

**Songbooks**  
Twenty plus songs on CD with booklet and hits. Two collections.  
Season songbooks. Music notation, lyrics. Full version and backing track.

**New development**  
Series of beginners’s level videos.  
i-*witness: Cultural learning on video.  
Twenty videos per year. Will be language progression over three years.  
Open source learning environment for exercises MOODLE.  
Web link to follow (from Chris).

**Presentation by Selja Saarialho, Otava, Finland**  
CEF is reflected in the new National Curriculum for lower and upper secondary schools.  
Lots of aspects –such as skills training – are not so new, as they have been established in the Finnish classroom for a long time. What is new is the use of the reference levels.  
CEF and the new NC are refelcted in Otava series **Culture Cafe** for the upper level of secondary schhol.  
Diagnostic Listening test at the beginning of the book.Reference point against which to test their abilities later.  
Listening text: Level of texts announced on CD.  
Volume 2: Emphasis on speaking.  
Volume 3: Reading  
Volume 4: Writing  
Volume 5 and 6: All four skills including evaluation at the end.  
Portfolio is openly described in the Recipe book.

**Presentation by Velta Matisane, Zvaigzne, Latvia**  
National Standards of Education were established several years ago for the different levels.  
Grade 3: Culture of communication includes examples of presentation and everyday communication. At Grade 9 reference also to non-verbal skills.
The National Textbook started in 1998 with 12 people in team, now only Velta remains. In Latvia international and national books are on offer side by side. Many teachers opt for international books.

Tough competition for locally produced course books.

Local books can supply concepts that are not possible in international books, eg cross-cultural and intercultural learning.

Adapting books for national textbooks:
The National Textbook is skills and task-based; it reflects new trends in teaching approaches that are not always easily accepted by teachers in the current system. So the book must support this by including strategies to support learning and skills development: Learning how to learn.

Information on the textbook Challenge (Textbooks, Workbooks, Cassettes, Teacher’s Guide) was distributed to all participants.

Self-evaluation and self-assessment are considered very important and the teacher’s role in the classroom needs revaluation in this context. Also the students are responsible for their learning. Group work should be integrated into the learning process. Importance of social skills.

Evaluation of learning after each unit.

Themes from national standards for example are integrated into the table of contents.

Detailed handouts with further information were distributed.

**Presentation by Odeta Venckiene; Sviesa, Lithuania**

General programs and National standards developed by the Ministry.

General programs only related theoretically to the CEF.

CEF is not yet available in Lithuanian.

A Portfolio has been developed and submitted to Strasbourg for approval.

A working group has been formed to start relating Lithuanian Standards to the CEF.

Aims:
- Development of the ELP in Lithuanian version
- To validate and publish ELP.
- Establishing testing centres for those who wish to test according to CEF

CEF in the context of textbooks: Analysis takes place by the authors.

Implementation of reference levels only, not other sections of the CEF.

Subsequent discussion on CEF and implementation:

Tomas: CEF only refers to language learning. Any developments in other countries?

Cedric pointed out that German standards have been developed in other subjects.

Chris Bishops pointed out EC funds are available for developing e-learning.

Preben also asked for any spontaneous suggestions for future topics.

Odeta suggested the situation with second foreign languages.

Preben proposed the possibility of cooperation on bilingual (CLIL) materials.

Can be discussed as a possible project in Frankfurt.

Testing formats

Latvia has lots of experience: Language framework.

Preparing for exams is felt to be the job of students. Two day final tests. In all skills.
Including speaking etc. Oral examination.

Preben: All losers in PISA except Finland.

More pressure to test according to levels. So perhaps testing for leaving exams could be a topic for further discussion in the future.

Should publishers prepare materials to prepare teachers and students for exams?. Latvia and Lithuania say yes.
Laura: All the talk of testing kickbacks is frightening. In the CEF the accent is not on testing but far more on self-assessment and evaluation.

**Conclusion of the conference**

Preben closed by thanking all the participants, Matthias for his particular help in preparing the conference and of course especially the hosts for all their hospitality and hard work in ensuring a successful conference.