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## Teaching in Plurilingual Environments with a Minority Language: Analysis of a Pre-service Training Project

The article presents some results of international research conducted within the Comenius 2.1 INFO project – Designing a training model for teachers working in multilingual areas with minority languages. The project led to the development of an in-service teacher training model that enables teachers to use didactic and methodological materials, knowledge, attitudes and strategies to enhance their teaching practice and to promote fully the developmental potential of students speaking minority languages. The professional profile that emerged from the study takes into consideration all the qualification elements that constitute a common denominator to multilingual school systems with a minority language presence and that have allowed researchers to identify specialization modules and to explore problems and themes studied within the European study programme.

**Keywords:** minority language, Italian, Comenius 2.1, teacher training, teachers, multilingualism, teacher training course model.

## Poučevanje v večjezičnih okoljih z manjšinskimi jeziki: analiza projekta izobraževanja učiteljev

*V članku avtorica predstavi rezultate mednarodne raziskave, ki je bila izvedena v sklopu projekta Comenius 2.1 INFO – Oblikovanje modela usposabljanja za učitelje, ki delajo na večjezičnih področjih z manjšinskimi jeziki. Avtorji so z raziskavo identificirali in razvili model usposabljanja učiteljev, ki bo omogočil razpolaganje z didaktičnimi in metodološkimi prijemi, znanjem, pristopi in strategijami za izboljšanje pedagoške prakse ter vsesplošno spodbudili razvojni potencial učencev, govorcev manjšinskih jezikov. Na podlagi raziskave je bil izdelan strokovni profil, ki upošteva vse kvalifikacijske elemente, ki predstavljajo skupni imenovalec večjezičnim šolskim sistemom z navzočnostjo manjšinskih jezikov. Raziskovalcem pa so omogočili, da izluščijo študijske module za specializacijo ter poglobljanje problematik in tematik, s katerimi so se ukvarjali v okviru evropskega študijskega programa.*

**Ključne besede:** manjšinski jezik, italijanščina, Comenius 2.1, usposabljanje učiteljev, učitelji, večjezičnost, model za usposabljanje učiteljev.

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## 1. Introduction

The article presents some results of international research conducted within the Comenius 2.1 INFO project – Designing a training model for teachers working in multilingual areas with minority languages (2005–2007). One aim of the project was a teacher training model based on quality indicators that correspond to new professional competences required in multilingual areas, and by multilingual teaching forms and didactics. As the project proceeded various educational needs were identified, relating to the socio-cultural context, the system and the teaching staff. Based on needs analysis, a framework of reference for knowledge, abilities and attitudes required from teachers working in multilingual contexts was identified.

The professional profile developed during the study took into consideration all the qualification elements that are in common to all multilingual educational systems that include minority language learning. These qualification elements allowed for the identification of speciality models and for a close examination of problems and themes studied within the European training course.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations: Education for Bilingualism and Multilingualism

The path to bilingualism and multilingualism is gradual and exceptionally complex. Successful bilingual or multilingual education is the result of a number of different factors, one of which is successful language teaching. In recent years, language learning and teaching in bilingual areas has been influenced by events and conditions in society (migration processes, globalisation, the role and importance of English, etc.) that also changed the attitude to language, its role and the competences required (Čok 2009, Čok & Pertot 2010, Zudič Antonič 2017). In view of this, if we wish to pursue the goals of modern education, which are also the goals of modern society (between school and society there is a dialectic relationship: school is expected to educate in accordance with the needs of society), we must ask ourselves what sort of teaching should be organised. School as a reflection of a wider social community dictates that teachers achieve certain educational goals, but in heterogeneous classrooms teachers are faced with a very demanding and complex situation, since if they wish to motivate their students they have to be even more dedicated to their work (Zudič Antonič & Zorman 2014); they need new, different, up-to-date materials; they have to establish successful relations with their students and colleagues; they have to forge links with the community and draw from it information, answers, encouragement and challenges (Zudič Antonič & Malčič 2007).

Modern language teaching is based on a communicative approach and the development of the ability to communicate interculturally: teaching is focused

on the student and his or her communicational needs (Ciliberti 2012, Nalesso & Malčič 2007); it is directed at the learning process and takes into account different learning styles; it also takes into account that language, culture and society are connected, and that an individual microcosm is a reflection of the social microcosm (Byram 1989); there are equal relations between teachers and students, which encourages and strengthens students' sense of responsibility and independence; lessons also include the use of information communication technology (ICT) (Balboni 1998).

With these factors in mind, it is necessary to introduce changes in language teaching/learning. In all the methodological approaches applied in the past, there were constants which received different emphasis in different periods: for example, the active, direct and oral method, the imitation method, the inductive method, the repetition method, and so on (Novak-Lukanovič, Zudič Antonič & Varga 2011). Another constant in methodological approaches, which can be very different from each other, is the basic didactic process. Methodological approaches depend on external and internal factors that influence the educational process. The external factors lie mainly in the cultural and political atmosphere of a particular historical period in a specific country, which to a certain extent determines the demands placed on educational institutions (Novak-Lukanovič 2011). Internal factors mainly consist of the development of an individual subject area and the attention given by the theoreticians of language learning and the authors of didactic materials to the different components of the teaching/learning process (Ciliberti 2001).

In our context, there are two main external reasons for the current changes: first, the Europeanisation of the national school system, which is supposed to be harmonised with the rest of the European Union member states (Council of Europe 2001), a foundational document for all EU members states for the preparation of annual work plans and curricula for languages, for examinations and textbooks, etc.); and second, the different population profiles in mandatory primary school, which have changed due to the migration processes and due to which it is necessary to manage the processes of language contact between the Slovene and Italian language/culture and between the languages/cultures of immigrants (Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo 2012, Novak-Lukanovič 2011).

The internal reasons for the methodological changes are based directly on the development of various disciplines that are important for teaching – mainly the teaching of languages and the attention that various participants pay to different components of the teaching/learning process. The modern theory of foreign language teaching is focused mainly on the individual, the various ways in which the individual learns languages, on different levels of motivation, prior knowledge and experience, and learning strategies. Due to these special features, it is necessary to organise a methodological differentiation that represents the end of global didactic coherence. We are transitioning to a period of eclecticism,

where different issues of a heterogeneous nature interact and take on a crucial role (Ciliberti 2012). The central discussions in foreign language teaching/learning revolve around the didactics of multilingualism and differentiation.

Education for multilingualism encourages the learning of a number of languages and sets a number of goals: cultural, linguistic and cognitive (Byram 1997, Demetrio & Favaro 2002). Differentiated didactics deals with numerous differentiation factors that are present in teaching/learning: the psycho-social aspect of the students and teachers, and the status of each individual language (Ciliberti 2012).

## 2.1 Didactics of Multilingualism: Cultural, Linguistic and Cognitive Goals

According to EU recommendations, every citizen should know four EU languages: in addition to the mother tongue, three other European languages at different levels. In order for European citizens to become multilingual, we should move from the didactics of a specific language to the didactics of languages, or, to the didactics of multilingualism. The goals that are supposed to be achieved in multilingual and the multicultural classrooms are complex and can be divided into three groups:

- cultural goals: education for multiculturalism and diversity; development of the ability to understand and interpret other cultures in comparison with one's own;
- linguistic goals: development of the knowledge of languages and at least some of the functional types (depending on the level of language competence and the set goals);
- cognitive goals: development of flexibility, curiosity, ability to adapt and create strategies for learning languages at different levels.

### 2.1.1 Cultural Goals

Intercultural education and education for diversity must be developed in all subjects, as this is the only way to realise interdisciplinarity, education for understanding and managing complex phenomena, and for resolving conflicts. Cesari Lusso (1992, 100) says that this is a “concept that needs to be considered in all its complexity and realised via global pedagogical projects”.

### 2.1.2 Linguistic Goals

For the achievement of linguistic goals, differentiation of curricula and differentiated teaching are crucial, whereby ICT and integrated language learning (CLIL) are of great help. In addition, it is necessary to differentiate the skills in the acquisition of different languages and various competences.

### 2.1.3 Cognitive Goals

Considering that the fundamental goal of modern language teaching is to “teach how to learn”, it is necessary to develop and strengthen in students the awareness of the role they play as students, develop the skill of independent learning and awareness of its importance, as well as a responsible attitude to learning, critical thinking and self-evaluation (Ciliberti 2012). Differentiation of teaching (Puren 1996) or the concept of pedagogical variation (Dabène et al. 1990) assume that we are setting different goals for different students in the classroom, choosing different content, exercises and activities, and using different approaches, techniques, tools and take into account different working rhythms (in line with personality, interests, motivation, goals, cultures, habits, success and the language competence level of each student). Connecting different fields, views and findings “is the practical response /.../ to differentness, heterogeneity, changeability, instability, multiplicity” (Dabène et al. 1990, 96).

Pursuing the European reference framework (Council of Europe 2001), students cannot acquire the expected competences from the curriculum once and for all, since these are flexible competences that are realised in the use of language/languages in real communication situations, and for this the ability to adapt and negotiate is necessary. Different contexts, diverse problems that have to be solved, the new, unpredictable situations we find ourselves in, demand from us a suitable response. In these situations, it is necessary to know how to use/adapt language, which is why we must achieve creative, dynamic linguistic competences. If we use one or more languages for communication, this means that we must be familiar with active strategies, we must be open, flexible and adaptable. We must be ready to know how to learn, which means that we have to:

- master the dynamic knowledge of things (linguistic and cultural knowledge);
- know how to do certain things with the help of suitable strategies;
- know how to be and be skilled at the cognitive, emotional and cultural level (in the European reference framework this is the existential competence (Council of Europe 2001, 157).

## 2.2 Training Teachers

The key factor for developing all these competences is suitable teacher training. Teachers who teach a language in a multicultural and multilingual classroom must primarily have an excellent knowledge of the language they are teaching, while at the same time they must also be equipped with new skills in language teaching and learning, and for this they must be trained in language teaching and learning on a continuous basis. On top of this, teachers who want to successfully organise student-focused teaching, must receive appropriate encouragement and help. Thus it is no longer enough for modern teachers to attend traditional seminars and spend some time abroad, but they have to be faced with various situations in which they use the language, testing themselves and acting in the local as well as

national and international context (Novak-Lukanovič, Zudič Antonič & Varga 2011). Only broadly educated teachers will manage the duties placed on them by the modern society and during their lesson and material preparation, as well as in the planning and conduction of lessons, constantly direct their attention to the students and their needs, wishes, interests, etc., delivering modern, innovative and engaging lessons. Institutions must support teachers in this by listening to the needs of teachers, students and the community. Motivation, self-respect and mutual help that contribute to the professional and personal growth of teachers also have considerable influence on everyday pedagogical practices, the teachers' self-realisation and the enactment of changes in school and consequently in society (Novak-Lukanovič 2011).

### **3. International Project Comenius 2.1 INFO – Designing a Training Model for Teachers Working in Multilingual Areas with Minority Languages**

The project was set up to cope with the needs of teachers operating in various European linguistic minorities. The bilingualism and even the multilingualism that characterizes minority native-speakers and influences their linguistic competence require that teachers operating in schools with minority languages possess particular knowledge and adopt adequate attitudes and approaches in their work. In recent years the preservation of minorities has raised as a result of self-promotion by minorities themselves. In any case, there are many differences between norms adopted in various European environments, leading to diversified approaches used in teaching the mother tongue in schools.

There are nevertheless many differences between legal systems in various European countries that decide how mother-tongue languages are taught in schools. In some countries, a minority language is taught from primary school level, in others it is offered as optional subject or as an extra-curriculum project. In some other countries, teaching in the mother tongue is simply not provided for by law (Balboni 1999, Novak-Lukanovič, Zudič Antonič & Varga 2011). In order to introduce a minority language into monolingual school-systems where subjects are largely taught in the national language, teachers need particular competence and knowledge to promote the minority language in a multilingual curriculum. A school system in the area with a minority language presence has to identify and implement a didactic strategy and a methodology that allows for the promotion of the students' mother tongue, other languages spoken in the area, as well as other European languages (Balboni, Coonan & Ricci Garotti 2001, Rasom 2007, Roberts 2007).

The project has been developed in collaboration with various partners<sup>1</sup> working in areas with minority languages. The multilingual areas involved in the project are: the Ladin area in the province of Bolzano/Bozen, represented by the

Istitut Pedagogich Ladin; the Ladin area in the province of Trento, represented by the Sorastanza de la scoles de Fascia; the Slovene area in Carinthia, represented by the Pädagogische Hochschule Kärnten, Klagenfurt; the Friulian, Slovene and German-speaking area in Friuli Venezia Giulia, represented by the Direzione Scolastica Regionale Friuli Venezia Giulia, and the Istituto Regionale di Ricerca Educativa Friuli Venezia Giulia; the Sardinian, Catalan and Tabarchinan area in Sardinia, represented by the Istituto Regionale di Ricerca Educativa della Sardegna; the Welsh area in the United Kingdom, represented by Denbighshire County Council; and the Italian area of the Slovene coast represented by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska.

In the first phase of the project the teachers' needs and the educational requirements of the social and cultural areas were identified. The team distributed questionnaires, managed discussion groups and gathered data on the activities and the projects in minority language in schools of the eleven different multilingual areas involved in the project. Based on the results from the analysis of teachers' needs and those of the head teachers and stakeholders, the working group drafted a training-course model. The model consists of a set of guidelines for the design of a specific training course for teachers who teach in multilingual areas where a minority language is spoken. The course is to be offered as in-service teacher training (Rasom 2007).

Guidelines help institutions in planning course contents based on teachers' needs. The course is to be offered to teachers who wish or need to promote a project or an activity in the minority language, or compare their practice with a multilingual didactic approach that involves the pupils' mother tongue (in the case of a minority language), or teachers who wish to compete professionally with European teaching standards that are becoming increasingly directed towards multilingual didactics (Nalesso & Malčič 2007).

### 3.1 The Research

#### 3.1.1 The Present State, Needs and Expectations of Minority Language Teachers Operating in Multilingual Areas

The study began with a needs analysis by means of questionnaires distributed to school head teachers (41 questionnaires), teachers (281 questionnaires) and stakeholders (39 questionnaires), i.e. parents, politicians and cultural organizations. Later on, discussion groups were organized with the above mentioned respondents to discuss problems, expectations and perceptions beyond those included in the questionnaire. At the same time activities and projects in the minority language were planned for the school year 2004–2005 (Roberts 2007, Cosulich 2007). From the questionnaires and discussions numerous data emerged on teaching methodologies and contexts used in the instruction of a minority language in primary education.

From the Slovene Istria multilingual area the following institutions participated in the INFO study: 8 elementary schools, i.e. all three schools with Italian as language of instruction (ES (elementary school) Pier Paolo Vergerio il Vecchio in Koper, ES Dante Alighieri in Izola, ES Vincenzo De Castro in Piran) and 5 schools with Slovene as language of instruction (ES Elvira Vatovec in Prade, ES Oskar Kovačič in Škofije, ES Dušan Bordon in Semedela, ES Vojka Šmuc in Izola, ES Ciril Kosmač in Piran). On the Slovene coast 8 questionnaires were distributed to schools head teachers, 40 to teachers (10 teachers per school with Italian as language of instruction and 2 teachers per school with Slovene as language of instruction) 5 questionnaires were distributed to stakeholders (parents, majors, institution managers). 10 teachers per school with Italian as language of instruction and 5 stakeholders participated in the study. The head teachers' viewpoint on the state of Italian schools in Slovenia is represented in its entirety since head teachers of all Italian schools on the Slovene coast were involved in the study. Among 11 participants in discussion groups some had previously completed the questionnaire, others not.

### 3.1.2 Questionnaires, Discussion Groups, Planning Activities

The number of questions in the questionnaires ranged from 12 (stakeholders) to 27 (teachers). The questionnaire was divided into sections discussing various aspects of minority language instruction. In the first part respondents were asked to self-evaluate their linguistic competences and teaching results, in the second part data on teaching methodologies were collected, the third part focused on linguistic policy, and the final part investigated teachers' expectations, perceptions and needs. This final part resulted in the most interesting and innovative study area. Questions were designed as closed type questions, but allowing some flexibility in answer levels. A small number of questions were followed by a yes/no answer, the majority offered a gradual answer ranging from one (the lowest level) to seven (the highest level). In addition, a space for ideas, suggestions and personal reflections on the minority languages universe was included. In discussion groups participants were invited to express themselves freely on the same topics included in questionnaires. Data on multilingual materials and materials in a minority language were collected by school staff by means of forms elaborated by the INFO project researchers.

## 3.2 Presentation of Results

The results that emerged from the study are complex and have thus been analysed and interpreted in different ways. In the following paper a brief synthesis on selected comparative data that emerged from the study are presented.

### 3.2.1 Linguistic Competence in a Minority Language

Head teachers were asked to evaluate teachers' linguistic competence in the minority language, in the national language and in European languages. Teachers were asked to self-evaluate their linguistic competence in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. San Pietro school head teachers (Sardinia), where Tabarchino is used in full-immersion schools, claim that 100 per cent of their teachers are as competent in Tabarchino as they are in their mother tongue. Ladin school head teachers in Gardena, Badia (Italy) claim that 73 per cent of teachers speak the minority language fluently, and the rest follow closely (levels 6 and 5). The lowest level of competence was declared by head teachers of German speaking areas in Friuli and Alghero schools in Sardinia. Friuli head teachers consider only 10 per cent of teachers to reach the highest level of competence in the minority language, although the remaining 90 per cent were positioned at level 6. In Alghero primary schools apparently only 13 per cent of teachers master the minority language, the largest percentage of teachers were positioned in the level 4 (63 per cent).

These data do not allow for cross checking with teachers' answers because the teachers involved in the study are minority language teachers and thus master the language perfectly while the head teachers' answers referred to all teaching staff. The majority of teachers that teach, plan or carry out activities in the minority language consider their linguistic competence as medium-high (levels 5, 6 and 7, with the mean 5.7). The highest answers were given by Welsh immersion schools teachers, the lowest answers were collected by teacher operating in schools with Welsh offered as a second language. Teachers on the Slovene coast chose the level 6.5, likewise the Ladin, Catalan, German teachers in Friuli and Catalan teachers in Alghero. The least developed skill appears to be writing. Listening and reading skills were self-evaluated by teachers at levels 6.2 and 5.9 respectively, while they consider their writing skills much lower, this is particularly evident with Friulian and Sardinian teachers (Cosulich 2007).

### 3.2.2 Awareness of New Didactic Approaches and Experimentation

The questionnaire distributed to teachers included questions on teaching/learning models (one teacher-one language, one language-one context, and full linguistic immersion). Teachers showed the most comprehensive knowledge on the full-immersion technique, but the most used teaching model seems to be one language-one context. Teachers are aware of a variety of other teaching models, some of them were brought up by teachers themselves (CLIL, integrated linguistics didactics, a time lap-a language and others). In data interpretation the variety in schools systems must be taken into consideration. In some areas the minority language is used as the language of instruction, while in others it is

used in specific teaching activities (for example, projects). The majority of head teachers and teachers said they were willing to try new methods and techniques in teaching minority languages. In particular, 66 per cent of teachers are willing, while 34 per cent of teachers are not interested in trying new ways of minority languages teaching/learning (Cosulich 2007).

### 3.2.3 Didactic Materials

The question “Do you use didactic materials in the minority language?” could be answered with: “never/occasionally/often/always” (Cosulich 2007, 55). It emerged that the textbook is the most commonly used didactic material in minority language instruction. 58 teachers said they use it always, 82 often. Some other materials are used as well, such as magazine articles, internet, audio-visual materials and multimedia, although less frequently. Teachers in Slovenia gave similar answers to the median answer: 69 per cent said they use the textbook often, 71 per cent use occasionally magazine articles and/or newspapers, 69 per cent of teachers never search for didactic materials on the internet, 79 per cent and 65 per cent occasionally use audio-visual materials and multimedia respectively (Cosulich 2007). A large number of Slovene teachers prepare didactic materials personally. The highest percentage of teachers that prepare didactic materials (100 per cent) is Catalan language teachers in the region of Alghero, followed by Welsh immersion schools teachers (77 per cent). Slovene teachers declared that occasionally they use didactic materials prepared by their colleagues, as well as materials prepared in collaboration with colleagues (66 per cent). Didactic materials are often borrowed from a library (50 per cent) and occasionally from research institutes (42 per cent). In general, 57.5 per cent of teachers said they never borrow didactic materials from research institutes, or universities/associations (Cosulich 2007).

### 3.2.4 Contribution to Minority Language Promotion

All the respondents were asked to evaluate the level of contribution of their school or association/institution to the promotion of the minority language. 43.9 per cent of head teachers estimated their school’s role in minority language promotion as completely decisive, while only 17.9 per cent of stakeholders and 27 per cent of teachers share the same opinion. Specifically, Slovene area teachers consider their activity as absolutely decisive to L1 promotion and 50 per cent of head teachers consider their school’s activity as completely decisive.

### 3.2.5 Communication

Views on the efficacy of relations between schools and institutions that operate in minority language (research institutions, museums, cultural associations,

cultural institutes etc.) are also contrasting. According to head teachers, relations between schools and institutions are of average effectiveness (5.2 on a scale from 1 to 7) with peak responses (7) for the primary school from San Pietro and schools in Fassa. Ladin schools in Gardena and Badia positioned themselves at 6.5, together with Slovene schools and Welsh immersion schools. The lowest figure was registered by head teachers of Friulian schools and Slovene schools in Carinthia with a low level of 2.5 and 3.2 respectively. Interestingly enough, only 17 per cent of stakeholders positioned themselves at the highest level of efficacy, the majority (21.4 per cent) positioned themselves at levels 5 and 6. A slightly higher percentage of teachers (22.2 per cent) assessed the communication as completely effective. 23 per cent positioned themselves at level 6 and 14.4 per cent at level 5 (Iori & Fanton 2007).

### 3.2.6 Underlying Motivation

The motives that urge teachers to promote a minority language are often cultural (66.8 per cent) and personal (61.2 per cent of respondents). The political motive was the least popular, with 12.1 per cent of teachers who answered often and 12.8 per cent who answered fairly. The same is true of economic motives. The majority of respondents (34.2 per cent) considered these as offering little motivation for engagement in the minority language teaching.

### 3.2.7 Professional Confidence

The answers to questions on teachers' planning abilities and the level of contentment with their work were interesting. The majority of Ladin teachers ranged themselves to medium-high levels (4, 5 and 6) and only 13 per cent declared themselves to be absolutely confident. By contrast, 50 per cent of Friulian language and 85 per cent of Italian teachers in Slovenia and Welsh immersion schools teachers are confident in their professional abilities. 49 per cent of teachers declare themselves to be satisfied (level 6) and only 8 per cent of respondents were completely satisfied with their professional work. The most satisfied appear to be Welsh immersion schools teachers, where 46 per cent of teachers were completely satisfied. The least confident professionally are Friulian and Catalan language teachers (4.60 and 4.71 respectively).

## 3.3 Teaching Results

Stakeholders were asked to evaluate the results of schooling in the minority language carried out by elementary schools of their area. On a scale from 1 (absolutely negative) to 7 (absolutely positive), the majority of respondents (37 per cent) chose the level 5. Only 11 per cent of stakeholders were completely satisfied with their school's/institute's work.

### 3.3.1 Implementation of Regulations

Interesting results emerged from a cross comparison of answers given by stakeholders and head teachers to the question “To what extent are the possibilities for minority language promotion provided for by the law in your region exploited in primary school?” (Cosulich 2007, 63). The highest level of stakeholders (24.1 per cent) chose level 4 and the rest chose equally levels 2, 3, 5 and 6 (13.8 per cent). On the other hand, the majority of head teachers chose levels 5, 6 and 7, with the exception of Friulian and Sardinian head teachers who believe that regulations provided for by law are not fully implemented (Cosulich 2007).

Despite the variety in the degree of the minority language presence in school systems involved in the project, individual elements shared by all were identified, such as: aiming at teachers’ didactic and linguistic competences through vocational training programmes; aiming at enhancing teaching quality and experiencing new methodological approaches that involve all subjects, in order to suggest decisive interventions at a multi-disciplinary and multi-linguistic level; offering a larger and a more diversified range of didactic materials in the L1 that appear to be quantitatively lacking in all regions involved in the inquiry. Further, all regions aim at linguistic and cultural awareness-raising among students through minority language assessment, integration and diversity acceptance, comparison and cohabitation education. All participating regions also set forward the need for greater visibility of what is done and produced, involving the area and the institutions in a minority language valorisation project (Perini & Capriata 2007).

## 4. The Training Course

### 4.1 European Training Course Model

Based on the results from the analysis of teachers’ needs and those of the head teachers and stakeholders, INFO project researchers drafted an experimental training course model for primary school teachers who teach and/or teach in a minority language. First of all, the course structure was drafted. The research group agreed on the development of an in-service training course that allowed for the use of strengths offered by the project, specifically cooperation with other European minorities, exchanging experience, teacher exchanges. The teacher training course began with five days at the Ladin Pedagogical Institute in Bolzano. In the second phase, teachers tried out what they had learned in class. During this period teachers were supported by periodic contacts with project tutors. The results of class work were presented and discussed at the follow-up meeting in Ortisei in Val Gardena (Italy) (Rasom & Capriata 2007).

The course content was discussed and agreed at project meetings. Course

tutors to support teachers during the experimental work were chosen on the basis of their previous experience and specialisation. 21 teachers attended the course: approximately three teachers from each participating region. In the first session, themes such as language policy in school activity, the legal framework of European minority languages protection, project management in teaching, and multilingual education and minority language teaching were discussed in combination with workshops where didactic materials and other teaching means were produced. The process was monitored by means of evaluation tools. During the follow-up session, teachers exchanged experience of their experimental work in class. Projects developed in schools were presented and discussed. Discussion monitoring offered teachers valuable information on the knowledge transmitted during the course. From the course and follow-up evaluation, it emerged that the majority of participants considered the course as innovative and, in particular, as a motivation for further activities that promote minority languages within multilingual didactics. This was particularly evident in cases where promotion of the minority language depends largely on the goodwill of individuals or on personal interests (Rasom & Capriata 2007).

Despite the differences that characterise the participating areas, some key elements in common to all school projects were identified. These may be adopted and adapted to other minority languages contexts. The elements in common are the choice of a communicative approach that focuses on oral abilities and on operational abilities, aiming at the improvement of oral language standards; the use of innovative teaching modalities and techniques characterised by flexibility, consideration for students' individual learning styles and strategies; workshops as an adequate working modality in the primary school; the use of activities that motivate students didactically and emotionally, enhancing their interest in their own language and language community, as well as in other languages and cultures; the use of a large variety of materials, the majority of which have been produced by participating teachers in order to respond to individual students' demands and to enhance their curiosity about their origins and cultural traditions; the use of modern technologies in all school projects in order to support better communication among students; the consideration of language as a privileged cultural resource, as a stimulus for multilingualism and language learning, as well as intercultural education; and finally, the awareness that linguistic integration and integration with other languages are the foundation of a learning process that gives dignity and strength to a minority language in a curriculum that is truly multilingual.

## 5. Conclusions

The training course designed by INFO for primary school teachers may be adapted to different minority areas in Europe, since it has a general approach and

takes into consideration a variety of aspects that were identified in the detailed study on the requirements and needs of teachers in their local educational contexts (Perini & Capriata 2007, Rasom & Capriata 2007). The general and specific competences to be achieved through the course and the related project activities related to the areas of knowledge and practical experience; they touched upon the substance of education in multilingual minority areas. Due to its rich content and the standing of the experts, the course may be considered as a sound foundation and a strong stimulus for research and action in the schools of all the participants. We hope that the project results, published and disseminated in many different regions, will help decision makers and educational personnel to cope with problems arising from globalisation and to achieve the ideal of “unity in diversity” as a fundamental goal of the European Union (Rasom 2007).

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Project partners: Istitut Pedagogich Ladin, Bulsan/Bolzano/Bozen, Italy (coordinator); Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Ufficio Affari Internazionali, Rome, Italy; Sorastanza de la scoles de Fascia, Val di Fassa, Italy; Direzione Scolastica Regionale Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trieste, Italy; Istituto Regionale di Ricerca Educativa Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trieste, Italy; Istituto Regionale di Ricerca Educativa della Sardegna, Cagliari, Italy; University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper, Slovenia; Pädagogische Hochschule Kärnten, Klagenfurt, Austria; Denbighshire County Council, Denbigh/Wales, United Kingdom.