

L*ooking A*head and C*ollecting S*olutions

LACS: Language Associations and Collaborative Support Workshop organized by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria

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Preface

Language associations and their activities focus mainly on the enhancement of teacher development. The chance to participate in the **Language Associations and Collaborative Support (LACS)** Workshop organized by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, Austria was a real eye opener in the advancement of educating and learning. The workshop's main aim was to support language teacher associations in the review and development of their own working structures and processes. This opportunity offered interesting insights and new perspectives for the growth of associations across Europe. In this paper, we will give an account of the workshop and present indicative innovations that could be considered for implementation in the Panhellenic Association of State School Teachers of English (PEKADE).

Venue, organizers

The Language Associations and Collaborative Support (LACS) project was organized and managed by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). It is one of the ECML 2008-2011 programmes (Empowering Language Professionals) which creates opportunities for language teacher associations to benefit from greater collaboration with one another as well as engagement within the range of the ECML projects. The LACS project was held in Graz, Austria for two days, in December 10-11, 2009. It offered us the opportunity to meet professional colleagues from other countries, share ideas and gain a European perspective on our work. Thirty-five educationalists from different countries across Europe attended it. The visiting group consisted of 34 representatives of member states, (including some from outside Europe) actively involved in language teacher associations namely teachers, school managers, university professors and teacher trainers. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the ECML was established in 1995 in Graz, Austria as a Council of Europe institution and it focuses on bridging the gap between language policy theory and classroom learning practice. This unique intergovernmental centre offers concrete approaches to issues and challenges facing Europe's multicultural societies. The hallmark of the ECML is the organisation of international language education projects. Coordinated by teams of experts, these projects primarily target multipliers in language education such as teacher trainers, textbook authors and experts in the area of the development of curricula, educational standards, evaluation/assessment and plurilingual education. Since 2000 the Centre's projects have been organised within four-year programmes. The second medium-term programme (2004–2007) grouped 2 projects under the title *Languages for social cohesion – language education in a multilingual and multicultural Europe*; The 2008-2011 programme is entitled *Empowering language professionals: competences - networks - impact - quality*. Projects usually last three or four years, a typical operational sequence being: research and development, presentation of preliminary results at a workshop, piloting, drafting of final product or publication, dissemination. The ECML seeks to make a positive difference to the language education profession by:

- promoting innovative approaches,
- advancing the quality of teaching and learning languages,
- supporting the implementation of language education policies,
- fostering dialogue between language education practitioners and decision makers.

Thus, the stakes are high for the ECML in its role of promoting excellence in language education.

The purpose of the LACS workshop

The LACS project's primary purpose was to explore the ways in which language teachers associations around the world are organized (nationally, regionally and locally) in order to support their networks of members through professional development activities such as practical interventions (workshops, publications, newsletters, websites and web fora etc) as well as through opportunities to influence policy towards the development of a vibrant, high quality and inclusive environment in which multilingualism can flourish. It aimed at facilitating greater collaboration between the associations and the ECML in order to better support language professionals across Europe through more effective dissemination of new language pedagogies, including teaching and learning methodologies as well as language policies and curricular models appropriate to the 21st century. The specific objective of the workshop was to find ways in which associations can interact, both face to face and virtually, in order to optimize the impact of their efforts. Furthermore, its main aim was to disseminate to a wide European audience (and beyond) innovative and effective developments and projects, carried out under the auspices of ECML such as "Web journals in language education (Blogs)" and "the CLIL quality matrix" and to discuss how different products may be further spread locally, through existing or new mechanisms. It also involved a "Scavenger Hunt" which required further exploration of the ECML website portal, which is being updated. The workshop offered us a valuable opportunity to meet up and explore educational issues and to obtain collaborative support for introducing changes in modern language teaching in our own local and regional context. The ECML event exceeded our expectations and it has motivated us to become more active in networking with other language teachers associations and to play a more influential role in reform processes in our professional environment. In addition, it has highlighted quality aspects of language education and it has contributed to developing our professional competence.

Main challenges for the associations were also discussed such as:

- Falling or aging membership
- Financial needs
- Cooperation with other unilingual or multilingual associations
- Challenges related to decline in language learning, either generally or specifically

Sources of funding for associations were discussed such as:

- Member subscription
- Conferences
- Other in-service events
- Publications
- Projects
- Government funding

The LACS project also came up with other ideas such as enhancing the ECML website and raising teachers' awareness of what is happening in language teacher associations around the world. The two-day visit to Graz ended with a guided city walking tour around the old town which is one of the best preserved city-centers in Central Europe.



Representatives from language teacher associations

Epilogue

The above mentioned workshop constitutes a sound basis for fostering and increasing links between PEKADE and other associations of language teachers in Europe. PEKADE along with other language associations fulfils similar functions which are:

- to provide in-service training by experts
- to carry out research
- to act as a forum for teachers
- to disseminate good practice
- to represent teachers' views on policy making bodies

Being an association of English language teaching in Greece, PEKADE's main task is to safeguard and improve the rights and well-being of our members as well as to keep a high standard of language learning and teaching in our country by promoting innovations in language education. PEKADE has always tried to concentrate on its main objective which is to open the way for in-depth discussions, debates, and classroom enlightenment with forward thinkers in English Language Teaching. Networking nationally and internationally and a sense of belonging to the European and global community of language teachers open the doors for PEKADE to many networks in Europe and overseas. Projects, such as LACS, enable us to meet colleagues, broaden our minds, and share experiences, expertise, and inquiries on professional matters.

The ECML's website

<http://www.ecml.at> (the central reference point for all individual projects, each of which has its own website)

<http://www.ecml.at/mtp2/mtp2e-overview.htm> (Results of the programme 2004-2007)

<http://www.ecml.at/doccentre> (Results of previous programmes)



Rosa Antonakaki among colleagues from other countries during the workshop