

Austria

Educating Multilingual Language Users

This vocational college for students aged 14 to 19 has a special focus on language learning and aims to expose its students to positive multilingual and multicultural situations. The program includes a mandatory 12-week work-placement, which most students complete abroad, and students contribute to international events (sport events, fairs, etc.). Some classes are taught in English, and students can take voluntary additional conversation classes and a “multilingual” seminar that focuses at metalinguistic awareness and offers practice in switching between languages. The school aims to extend its use of team teaching.

Main Focus of Innovation: CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION

Other keywords: blended/non-formal

General Information

Name of the ILE: Educating Multilingual Language Users

Location/Address: HLW Rankweil, Negrellistraße 50a, 6830 Rankweil, Austria

Website: www.hlwrnkweil.at

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

General Description of the vocational school HLW Rankweil/Austria

HLW Rankweil is a five-year College of Management and Services Industries. In addition to sound general education, the school provides an intensive vocational training in subject-related practical, theoretical and business-oriented subjects. Students develop working and decision-making skills that they can put into practice in careers in the services and public sectors as well as in the tourism and catering industries. Further objectives include personal growth, creativity, critical awareness, social involvement, teamwork, co-operation skills and communicative skills in both mother tongue and foreign languages.

The school also provides university entrance qualifications.

Language Learning: Education Multilingual Language Users

Modern languages offered within the curriculum (with levels achieved at the end of the school career).

Core Subjects: First Foreign language (B2/C1): English; Second Foreign Language (B1/B2): French; Third Foreign Language (specializing subject selected autonomously): choice between Spanish and Italian (A2/B1).

In addition to this, students in their third year study marketing in English and German (CLILL).

Voluntary Subjects: In their fifth year, students can choose additional conversation classes in any of the foreign languages.

Languages and Vocational Training:

The curriculum provides for mandatory work-placements of 12 weeks after the third year.

An overwhelming majority of the students at HLW Rankweil choose to complete their work-placement abroad, and they do so within the Leonardo programme. The foreign countries chosen by the students are GB, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Ireland. As far as languages are concerned, the stay abroad helps the students to improve their (oral) language skills in the language(s) spoken in the country and in the tourism industries in general. The challenge that teachers face when the students come back to school is how to deal with the enormous differences in language performance within one group due to the training that some have in one of their languages while others don't.

From time to time students also offer catering for international firms, at sports events or during fairs (one recent example is Val d'Isère 2009, see school homepage), another excellent opportunity for them to practise the languages they learn and experience multilingual and multicultural situations.

Multilingual Training as a voluntary subject

In Austrian schools, languages within the syllabus mostly present isolated entities and languages are strictly separated in teaching to avoid interference, which is mainly seen as negative; teaching languages thus is commonly based on the idea that there should not be any contact between the languages in a student's mind.

Language teaching in its traditional form, however, contradicts the results of research on multilingualism which evidence the links that exist between the languages in an individual's mind (see Jessner Ulrike, Linguistic Awareness in Multi-lingual's 2006). When students learn a language, all the other languages are activated in their brains.

Comparing and contrasting languages and concentrating on the similarities and differences between the languages helps the students use positive transfer and establish a “multilingual monitor“ that enables them to draw on all the languages they speak when they learn an L3, L4 etc.

The multilingual training is rooted in research about multilingualism, above all the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (Jessner), the role of metalinguistic awareness and the concept of multicompetence.

During year 4, the students can choose a voluntary subject called “Multilingual Seminar” (one hour per week). The aims of this class are:

- to train flexibility in switching from one language to another,
- to offer positive experience in multilingual communication settings through role-plays and simulations,
- to make the students aware of similarities and differences between the languages and train their metalinguistic awareness as well as language learning strategies.

We think that this combination of language learning in more traditional language classes, in CLILL classes, work-placement in international settings and multilingual training is an efficient and innovative approach to achieve the goals of lifelong (language) learning and individual and social multilingualism.

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

One clear indication that the initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at is the high percentage of students who complete their mandatory workplacement abroad. One important criterium for most of them is to improve their language skills.

Another indication is participation in the multilingual seminar (about 40% - 50% of all students in year 4, i.e. of those who are eligible), which is quite high considering the fact that the class, since it is optional, has to be taught in the afternoons, at the end of a long day.

In addition to this, a scientific study is being carried out that will show how the multilingual system present in the learner`s minds changes due to the training in metalinguistic awareness and the active use of different languages in multilingual contexts. The effects on the learners` motivation and the use of language learning strategies will be studied, too. The results of the study will be presented in about a year.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners` social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

For students

- Wider use of language learning strategies through implicit and explicit teaching of strategies
- Enhanced learner autonomy
- Flexibility in the use of languages through positive experience as multilingual speakers
- Lifelong language learning: e.g. interest in learning other languages
- Enhanced metalinguistic awareness
- Enhanced awareness of European issues (multilingualism in Europe, minorities and migrants and their languages, language rights etc.)

For teachers

- More team teaching: joint planning, instruction, and evaluation of learning experiences (in the case of the multilingual seminar), but also closer cooperation among teachers of languages (and other subjects) who understand and share responsibilities and plan language classes together. (Perry & Stewart 2005)
- Better insight into the principles of multilingual competences and current psycholinguistic concepts (e.g. the language user/language learner dichotomy; multilingual monitor; positive transfer, and others)
- Conscious use of English (first foreign language) as a bridge language/supporter language for the learning of further languages
- School Profile: development of a school profile for language learning that puts into practice the European and Austrian language education policies (LEPP process in Austria, European language policies)

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

Groups of Learners: 14-19-year-old learners at HLW Rankweil, a Vocational College of Management and Services Industries in Vorarlberg, Austria.

The school has about 475 students, i.e. 96 per year, and all of them study three foreign languages. The above mentioned activities - CLILL classes, multilingual training in the school and workplacement abroad plus international training possibilities in the tourism and catering industries - are offered during year 4 and 5. All students are eligible to take part (180 students in the two years). CLILL classes are compulsory for the students, the other classes are optional. The fact that a high percentage of students participate in these activities shows their interest in languages and heightened awareness of their importance for the future.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

The teachers are:

- Language teachers who prepare the students for their workplacement and their vocational training.
- Language teachers who themselves speak several languages and have adopted a multilingual approach.
- Teachers of business management with a very good command of English.
- One language teacher who completes a doctoral thesis at Innsbruck University (where one main area of research is multilingualism) on the questions whether metalinguistic awareness can be trained and how the multilingual system works in young people.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

Learning takes place within three different settings or approaches that correspond to different research areas and research findings (psycholinguistics, SLA and second language learning and teaching, humanistic approaches):

- a. The Role of metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness as described in recent psycholinguistic research on multilingualism
- b. Task-based/hands-on learning through a combination of vocational training and language learning/ language use, placing emphasis on the concept of the language user (V. Cook).
- c. Creating positive experience in multilingual settings, whether they be real (e.g. when students work in international settings - e.g. Val d'Isère February 2009) or simulations that recreate typical European multilingual and multicultural situations. The idea is to provide students with as many positive learning experiences as possible and make them practise their languages actively as multilingual and multicultural language users.

There is no curriculum available for the multilingual seminar, which means that the teachers involved (a team of 2-3 teachers) prepare and design new material that is used in the classes according to the needs of the students.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

Learning takes place inside the school building, but also outside, at international events, fairs, sports events in neighbouring countries or provinces.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

The multilingual seminar started in 2002 within the framework of a nationwide ESF-project whose aim was to promote innovative (language) learning projects. It was partly a result of several years of discussion among the teachers about more efficient language learning strategies and teaching methods, multilingualism and the need to train young people in the use of language (learning) skills.

Work placements abroad, which are partly funded through participation in the Leonardo programme, started in 2003; CLILL classes in Marketing have also been part of our programme since 2003.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

At the beginning, multilingual training (voluntary classes) and CLILL classes in marketing were partly funded through the ESF-project. Since 2006, all the classes have been financed by the Ministry of Education.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

School website: www.hlwrankweil.at

A film was produced in 2006 about work-placements abroad: The students prepared multilingual situations that they knew from their own experience (at the reception desk of a hotel, working in the kitchen, serving people food...) and presented them as role-plays to a wider audience. These role-plays were filmed.

Evaluations: Evaluations about the multilingual seminar are carried out by the teachers at the end of each schoolyear.

A study about attitudes on multilingualism and language learning among students and teachers was carried out in December 2008 by a student teacher who participated in the multilingual class.