

## Notes from Question Time (final plenary)

In the final plenary, three participants stated one particular thing they had learnt from the conference, and posed one question for the audience.

### Lara de Carlo, IAL-FVG

**L:** Lara said she had learnt a lot about family literacy, from Monica's session, about the use of poems for pronunciation practice, in Catharina's session, and about learning styles and numeracy, from Tracy and Mark's session.

**Q:** She said she would like to find out more about these areas, in particular learning styles.

**A:** Mark and Tracy both replied saying that the model followed was the Dunne and Dunne model of learning styles, and that there were other models available as well, e.g. Honey and Mumford's theory which categorises learners into activist/theorist/pragmatist/reflector. Lara was advised to look at resources and materials available on internet sites – these can be accessed via the project website, [http://www.math.muni.cz/comenius/numeracy\\_links](http://www.math.muni.cz/comenius/numeracy_links).

### Stepanka Bilova, Masaryk University

**L:** Stepanka said she had learnt that people are all doing similar things but in different places/countries; that Tracy's ideas were similar to those in the Czech Republic but slightly different.

**Q:** What do you think will be happening with basic skills teacher training in 10 years' time?

**A:**

*Peter Mayhew-Smith* of Lewisham College answered first. He noted that there is in general a huge demand on the public purse for funds in all areas, and that tough choices therefore have to be made amongst competing priorities. In the UK, education has become market led, and government money goes to individual local colleges, who are then responsible and accountable for choosing where the money is spent locally. For example, the local college may decide that more money should be spent on basic skills, and less on IT provision. Government policies are thus pushed through by means of financial incentives to encourage providers to follow and support policy, while leaving the final decision up to local providers.

Peter went on to say that it is becoming more important for the workforce to have high skill levels, and less work is low-skilled. Therefore, it is vital that learning exists for people with poor levels of literacy and numeracy skills. The winning of the Olympics bid by London means that more jobs will be created in construction. However, there are few students in this area at the moment in the UK, so workers will have to be encouraged from abroad. This then raises

## Comenius 2.1: training basic skills teachers

questions of training in both construction in the UK and in language – ESOL for construction.

Monica Heynen, of Waterford Institute of Technology, then asked: Where do people fit in to this new knowledge society if they have low skill levels?

Peter replied that while there would always be a need for people to pack shelves, bake bread, deliver goods etc., nobody was planning for these people and it was inevitable that there would be jobs which were 'low-pay' and 'low skills'. Or words to this effect!!!

*Pavel Horak*, of Masaryk University, replied that Czech as a foreign language may be a growth area.

*Dino del Savio*, of IAL-FVG, said that in Pordenone they have immigration from the north and south, and from the east as well, along with the respective language issues. Resources are a problem in dealing with this, and there is continuing debate. With China as the competition, there is a growing need for upskilling the workforce, and there is a push from the workforce and unions for this. However, Dino pointed out that this is all left to Latin creativity – meaning that there is a risk that one doesn't capitalise on one's assets as one should.

*Wolfgang Sucharowski*, of the University of Rostock, said that it was difficult to see what would happen in 10 years' time. In 2007, there would be a change in Germany in the teaching qualifications, with a Masters required. Wolfgang also noted that there are differences in the education systems between north and south Germany: in the north, there are more changes; in the south, there are fewer changes because there is no recognition of the need to have change. (The north and south have different political allegiances.) Wolfgang said that there is less money available for universities, that student numbers are increasing and hence universities are increasingly finding it difficult to manage.

*Ralf Kellershohn*, of APOLL, said that in Germany there is no formalised system of basic skill provision, that it is run by volunteers, and therefore can only get better(!). He noted that young people have to work on basic skills and IT and that the government has to recognise basic and second chance education as a priority. He noted that four million adults in Germany are functionally illiterate, and their needs are not currently being met.

### **Monica Heynen, Waterford Institute of Technology**

**L:** Monica said that she had been heartened to note the progress made in Ireland due to the publication of the IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) Report. She said that she had realised from the conference that the situation in Ireland appears to be somewhere between the UK and Germany.

## Comenius 2.1: training basic skills teachers

**Q:** From listening to Antje's and Alison's session on teacher training in Austria, and Helen Casey's on the subject specifications, she noted that there appears to be a tension between the high standards set for teachers of basic skills and the desirability of keeping experienced volunteers in place (who are often enthusiastic, have good communication skills, and are experienced in their field). How do you think this can be managed?

**A:**

*Peter Mayhew-Smith* replied that 20 years ago, he used to work with the West London team on the training of literacy teachers. He noted that although there was lots of enthusiasm and love of their work, it was also a very unprofessional offer to learners and haphazard provision; it was not taken seriously, and relied heavily on good will. He said that relying on the voluntary sector is not good enough because it is possible to note the professionalisation when investment occurs, and the huge leap in quality of the offer to learners. He stated that there is a need for the best teachers and therefore the best training. He also stated that a lot of teachers have left because it is now more targeted and there is more accountability. However, a voluntary service still exists.

*Jo-Ann Delaney*, of Lewisham College, added that this is also reflected in the ESOL sector. The traditional view of learners saw them as traumatised, and the tutor's role as one of welcoming them to the country. However, Jo-Ann agreed with Peter that learners deserve more than simply this, and that additional qualifications are necessary for professionalisation.

*Maxine Harraway*, of Lewisham College, agreed with Jo-Ann.

*Fiona Prendergast*, of Lewisham College, also agreed with Jo-Ann. She added that, in answer to Monica's question, having APEL (accreditation of prior experience and learning) procedures in place for the courses would perhaps help to give recognition to the skills that experienced tutors may already possess, but for which there is no formal recognition at present. Recognition of informal learning is one aspect of educational procedures which the EU is keen to promote as part of its lifelong learning strategy.

*Peter Mayhew-Smith* closed the discussion, noting that he looked forward to looking at further opportunities for cooperation.