

Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook (MIH): Tools for Learning History and Geography in a Multicultural and ICT Perspective*

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Abstract. Despite official educational guidelines, improved linguistic skills have been limited in all partner countries due to cuts in their national budgets. As a consequence CLIL experiences have been lessened, to the sole benefit of those involving English. Another reason for this project resides in the difficulty in modifying the guidelines of national programmes, which are often short-sighted as far as other cultures are concerned.

Finally, all European reports point out the shortage of materials and ICT-based contests suitable for interdisciplinary and multicultural education in school. The MIH (Multicultural Interdisciplinary Handbook) project meets these needs by providing new tools that will help teachers and pupils to plunge deeper into the culture and the language of another nation via its memorials, its history and its landscape/geography. Moreover, it intends to promote the common European identity, as it introduces a European perspective in the schools' History and Geography programmes, which are usually confined to national borders.

Keywords: History & Geography, CLIL, ICT, Learning Objects, Multicultural perspectives, e-learning.

1 Introduction: Project Overview

The aim of this Project is to build and share a set of tools that includes a Handbook, Digital Modules and a Teacher Training Course. They will offer a structured path through European contemporary History and Geography where the countries concerned will be those of the Project partners.

Today, it is generally national guidelines that determine school programmes; school handbooks and Didactics are based upon them. Going beyond the limits of the

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national programmes, and furthering the understanding amongst young people and their educators of the diversity of European culture, languages and values –the principal objective of the Comenius– we plan to operate at the level of the handbooks and Didactics. The main purpose of the entire MIH project is to offer a tool for studying events through an approach that is both comparative and interdisciplinary: historical content will be organised based on underlying geographical realities dealing with such topics as borders, migrations, landscape and resources.

The cooperative work of selecting and drawing up the key topics, a major activity of the project's core members, will provide the materials for designing a training course addressing current and future teachers that will emphasize the European dimension in teacher training.

The Handbook, available in the five languages of the partnership plus in English, can be used both by teachers interested in multicultural learning as well as by those involved in CLIL projects [1]. In the latter case, teachers will have at their disposal the consistent path, the original documents and a general methodology that recent reports have shown to be missing. They will promote language learning.

The Digital Modules will be the final tool of the project. The modules will be available as free video podcasts, web-based contents (HTML) and standard-packaged Learning Objects (SCORM – IMS) in order to use them in any Virtual Learning Environment, so in class or for independent study by pupils; they will motivate pupils by supporting listening comprehension and oral production and represent an important contribution to the development of digital educational content.

The project introduces at least five innovative elements in schools:

1. The Handbook is simultaneously a learning tool and an integrated and consistent presentation of historical events related to the transformation of the territories considered, completed by a methodological analysis.

2. It addresses CLIL classes (or similar) [2] but also regular classes, and can be used whenever a teacher chooses to make pupils aware of historical events as seen from the viewpoint of other nations.

3. The range of countries involved, including Spain and Italy as well as those further north, goes beyond that in the Franco-German handbook, which addresses bilingual regions and institutions involved in Franco-German cooperation.

4. The range of “foreign” languages in which the material will be available – beyond the three most common: French, German and Spanish – may increase interest in these languages; they include full support for both Italian and Polish.

5. The digital modules –based on selected excerpts of the Handbook– will be freely downloadable as podcasts. Key targets are teachers, who can use them in class, and students, who can use them for independent study. Other users who currently have no equivalent available can also use them. As a tool, it presents a number of advantages: it can motivate students and provides practice for listening comprehension; it is well adapted to ubiquitous learning principles; it widens the potential users and opens new paths for the exploitation of the results.

The Project life is from October 2009 to September 2011. We expect to release the first beta products by September 2010.

The Project website is <http://www.mihproject.eu>.

2 Objectives and Results Expected

The main objectives of the MIH Project are:

- Further the development of a common European identity by having schools participate in the culture of other countries using their languages and their collective symbolic imagery;
- Contribute to the creation of a new generation of school Handbook and ICT-based contents that can support teachers involved in CLIL experiences, or who are simply interested in them;
- Implement digital educational contents in schools.

The “Products” or Results will be:

1. A HandBook and Digital Materials, which deal with a choice of historical and geographical topics, selected among those that have had an important impact in the national imagery in the last two centuries. The final version of Handbook and Digital Modules will be available in all the languages of the partner countries.
2. A Teacher Training Course addressed to both future and in-service teachers. The training develops the topics dealt by the handbook and explains its methodology and issues.

3 Quality of the Consortium: Institutions Involved

The University of Salamanca leads the initiative and has well-documented experiences in international projects. It is involved via its InterAction and eLearning Researching Group (GRIAL), currently focusing on the production of educational podcasts and Learning Objects for both e-learning and b-learning contexts.

The German Universities of Augsburg and Siegen contribute with long expertise in Didactics of History in the fields of multicultural dialogue, methods and contents for teaching History in bilingual classes. They will share the responsibility for piloting the complete toolset.

The Department of History of the University of Venice contributes with scholars involved in teacher training, as so as in History and Geography Methodologies and Didactics. They are responsible for the state-of-the-art Studies and the Methodology for content developing.

The Polish Academy of Management has a language unit and also provides training for teachers. The Academy has vast experience in managing European projects. All the staff is competent in inter-cultural education.

The trainers at the IUFM of Créteil, a public teacher-training institute currently attached to the university of Paris XII, have already developed school handbooks as well as participated in European cooperation (MOBIDIC project). They are responsible for the layout of the Handbook.

Hafelekar Agency staff is responsible for the evaluation programme, dissemination and valorisation. They will collaborate closely with the University of Salamanca in order to ensure the highest quality in the whole processes.

The Paedagogische Akademie of Innsbruck staff is expert in both teacher training, especially as related to the design of curricula, and language teacher training. They will design the TTC.

4 Impact

Immediate beneficiaries, who will also be involved in evaluation and pilot testing, are:

- Future teachers of Languages, History and Geography enrolled with the partner institutions.
- Teachers currently in service in associated schools as well as those that can be reached in the course programme.

Teachers, students and anyone interested in European multi-cultural issues constitute the future beneficiaries. Depending on national programmes, the project deliverables will be used in the final year of lower secondary school, and the first two and the final years of upper secondary school. It thus addresses students ranging from 12 to 16 years of age.

Despite political statements and official educational guidelines illustrating a certain comprehension of the importance of mutual understanding, improved linguistic skills and ITC-based content have been severely limited in all partner countries due to cuts in their national budgets. This is perceptible in the reduction of the teaching of German and French languages, and even more so for other language classes to the sole benefit of English, where governments currently concentrate their financial resources.

While we cannot influence “national limits” set on school programmes, we can increase and adapt the didactic tools and have them correspond both to the goal of European integration and the desire of teachers to have available traditional and innovative classroom tools. This is precisely the objective of the MIH project, which will not only support teachers in developing interdisciplinary subjects and multi-cultural approaches, but also prepare them during their own training. They can use the hard-copy Handbook as well as the Digital Modules, knowing that these are available in both their “national language” and the alternative “foreign language,” depending on the objectives they assign to their teaching. The project may participate in reviving interest for European languages than English and contribute to redefine the contents of school programme.

5 Workplan

The Project consists of six steps:

1. Define key topics and methodology based on comparative studies and collaborative engagement.
2. Draft initial version of the handbook and implement quality evaluation.
3. Write the final version of the handbook in English and in the five languages of the partnership.
4. Develop a storyboard of the modules and produce the podcasts.
5. Design the teacher-training course.
6. Run a pilot study of the toolset and related quality evaluation.

Six milestones have been fixed to monitor the process; the milestones correspond to the deliverables from the above steps: 1. study report; 2. draft of the Handbook; 3. final English version; 4. translations; 5. design of the TTC; 6. production of the Digital Modules. The final milestone is planned to occur 18 months after the start of the project, after which the tools will be subjected to a six-month pilot-test and quality survey in associated schools.

The quality of the products will be assured by:

1. Peer reviews.
2. Evaluations delivered by associated schools.

6 Conclusions

Although the Project is now beginning its researching activities, we were able to confirm the claim for some kind of new learning tools and methodologies for History and Geography with a multicultural, CLIL and ICT approach. In the age of Google Maps and Google Earth, the possibilities for developing multimedia, interactive and multicultural learning contents should let us build such materials with a new methodological approach. After setting up the state of the art of the learning materials actually used by pupils in Europe, we will be able to develop the main structures of this methodology that will guide us through the main historical and geographical facts and contents in order to show different, multilingual and multicultural perspectives in the same learning content (that is particularly interesting regarding the History of Europe), enriched by new ways to present History and Geography by mixing audio and video clips, maps, documents, studies and statistics in a very attractive format.

We expect to explore and experience new methods and to find a very interesting approach to renew some learning contents regarding History and Geography with these perspectives: multiculturalism, CLIL, ICT.

Acknowledgments

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References

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2. A model can be seen at MOBIDIC Comenius Website,
<http://www.mobidic.org/home-UK/index.html>