

European minority language regions start coöperation on preschool education in MELT project

Leeuwarden, August 5th 2010 – Bringing up young children in a bi- or multilingual way in theory and practice, that is what the MELT project is about. MELT stands for Multilingual Early Language Transmission. Four European language communities coöperate in this project: Fryslân (Frisian in The Netherlands), Swedish speaking municipalities of Finland (Swedish in Finland), Wales (Welsh in Great Britain) and Brittany (Breton in France).

The MELT project is based on an initiative of the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NLPD) and is funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission for the period 2009 – 2011. Preparatory seminars were held in Wales, Occitania and in the Basque Country. The project officially started with a seminar in Fryslân (The Netherlands) in April of this year. There will be one more in Helsinki (2010) and a final conference in Brussels (2011).

Projectleader

The four regions all have their own role within the project, fulfilled by local organisations. Fryslân is represented by the Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (hosted by the Frisian Academy). Mercator is responsible for scientific research and is also overall projectleader of the MELT project. The Centre for Frisian Childcare (Sintrum Frysktalige Berne-opfang, SFBO) is the executor of the practical part in Fryslân. This centre has a partnership with Mercator.

Chief Executive of the SFBO, Sytske de Boer, said: "It gives me great pleasure to be part of this exciting project. The future of the language depends on the new generation's ability to speak and to use it in their everyday lives. Children can learn languages quickly, and by introducing the language to them from an early age we will lay down a strong foundation for them to further develop their skills in the long term." SFBO has played a key role in introducing Frisian to young children in Fryslân for over twenty years now. De Boer said: "Collaborating on the MELT project gives us an opportunity to share the ideas and expertise of our organisation in an international context. I'm sure we will learn a few lessons and best practices from the other countries as well."

Toolkit

As a representative of the Swedish-speaking municipalities in Finland, Folkhälsan has the responsibility of the development of a toolkit in eight languages. This toolkit builds on existing initiatives and best practices in the regions, such as the book "Language Strategy for Day Care Centres" written by Lillemor Gammelgård, which focuses on the Swedish language immersion program in Finland. The toolkit is a key component of the MELT project. It has to make parents and teachers aware of the benefits of a multilingual upbringing. The toolkit will offer them guidelines to support that process. The toolkit will be developed during the project and completed with examples of good practice in the participating regions. These are provided by the preschool teachers and training courses for the preschool stage.

An important product besides the toolkit is the awareness raising brochure aimed at young parents dealing with questions about bringing up their children in two or more languages. This brochure will take into account the different language situations in Europe.

Dissemination

Wales is represented by the Welsh Language Board (WLB), supported by the nursery schools movement Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin (MYM). Within the MELT project MYM handles the dissemination of information and products.

The products of the MELT-project are not only meant for the 4 mentioned partners, but also for the 11 language communities of the NPLD and later on for all multilingual regions in Europe.

Brussels Congress 2011

Bretagne / Brittany is represented by the Regional Council of Brittany (Conseil régional de Bretagne), supported by Divskouarn, which is responsible for the strengthening of Breton and multilingualism in Brittany in the preschool stage (école maternelle). As part of the MELT project, they will organise the final congress in Brussels in October 2011. On this conference results and recommendations of the project will be presented to the participating regions and the European Commission.

More information: www.mercator-research.eu.

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