

The Innsbruck Model of Fremdsprachendidaktik: Towards an integrated multilingual approach in pre-service teacher education

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Introduction

With the new *Studienplan* (curricular structure) for the Faculty of Arts at Innsbruck University fully in place since October 2002 and implemented step by step, the number of course hours allocated to *Fremdsprachendidaktik* (pre-service teacher education for foreign languages) has been increased from six to ten. In an initiative from the Department of Romance Languages, inter-departmental cooperation has been encouraged, thus removing a long tradition of single-language isolation in pre-service courses. A work-group involving representatives of the various language departments at the university was set up to discuss draft proposals.

It emerged that there was considerable common ground between what had previously been covered in pre-service teacher education in each of the individual languages. Areas such as theories of language acquisition, the evolution of modern language teaching methods, general methodological principles of communicative language teaching, as well as theories and principles of testing, evaluating and assessing in foreign language classrooms had been covered by all departments. It seemed sensible, therefore, to integrate all the work of these different departments into one project.

The synergy generated by this undertaking has proved particularly productive, especially by providing two inter-departmental courses at the beginning and the end of the overall pre-service teacher education: an initial course *Einführung in die Didaktik des Fremdsprachenunterrichts* (introduction to the teaching of foreign languages) and a final course *Testen und Bewerten* (testing and assessment). The model itself involves team-teaching for the initial and final course, while each language has its own workshop in which the principles in the initial course are worked out in practical teaching situations. The synergy has also been a welcome development from the student perspective, for at present about one third of them are studying two foreign languages.

The radically new dimension in this integrated program is a multilingual approach in foreign language teaching,

which includes flexible, selective and targeted code switching in the initial and final joint courses. The approach also takes into account new aspects of the acquisition and learning of various languages. One such aspect is the multilingual factor, namely the more languages one learns, the easier it is to learn the next one (cf. Herdina/Jessner 2002). For this reason, the joint courses are held bilingually (English and German), with shorter input sessions within the other languages or with recurrent references to them. The languages include English, French, Italian, Spanish and Russian, and even Classical Greek and Latin. One reason for the inclusion of the latter two languages is that it was felt that language awareness and metalinguistic knowledge are encouraged through reflecting on linguistic patterns in these languages in particular.

The Innsbruck Model

The approach of the Innsbruck Model is in line with the gradual move in European higher education towards becoming multilingual, as reflected recently in the European Union's aim for its citizens to be able to use their "mother tongue plus two other languages" (see Commission of the European Communities 2003¹). The Council of Europe (CoE) guidelines for the training of modern language teachers stress that initial teacher training and training programs should facilitate national and international cooperation. In fact, the new curriculum for the Austrian AHS-Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule (secondary grammar school) reflects closely the Common European Framework of Reference. Further recommendations from the CoE are:

- that student-teachers already have and now explore personal experience of the language learning process to promote awareness of their own learning and that of others, with a view to further informing their classroom practice.
- that reflective skills should be developed as an integral and practical part of all initial language teacher education and training programs, emphasis being given to a principled, but flexible conceptual framework, as shown in the diagram below (Skinner 1996):

¹ The report states: "Linguistic diversity is one of the European Union's defining features." (p.12)

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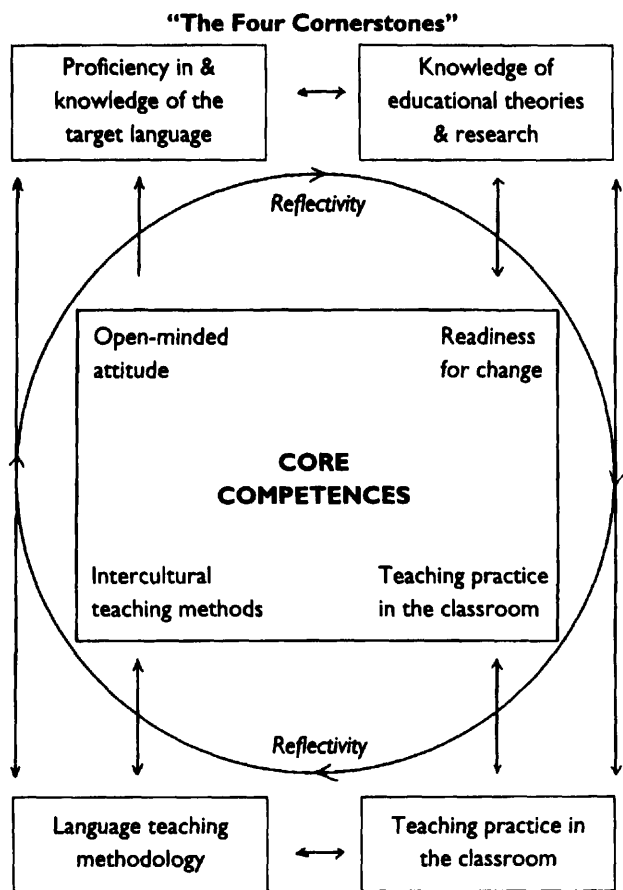


Figure 1: The CoE Framework

The main focus of the Innsbruck Model, as shown in the circular part of the diagram, is on REFLECTIVITY, that is, on principled methodologies gained through reflective practice. This is encouraged by highlighting the CORE COMPETENCES both at the beginning and the end of the overall program, namely in the initial and final joint courses for all foreign language teacher trainees.

While the initial course plus follow-up language-specific workshop amount to three of the ten hours, four hours in the middle of the overall program consist of modular options, specific to each language and dealing with a number of topics in greater depth (see Figure 2). This also enables trainees studying two foreign languages to carry out in-depth studies of topics they find especially interesting and challenging, e.g., Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), Humanistic Approaches, Media, Vocabulary acquisition and learning.

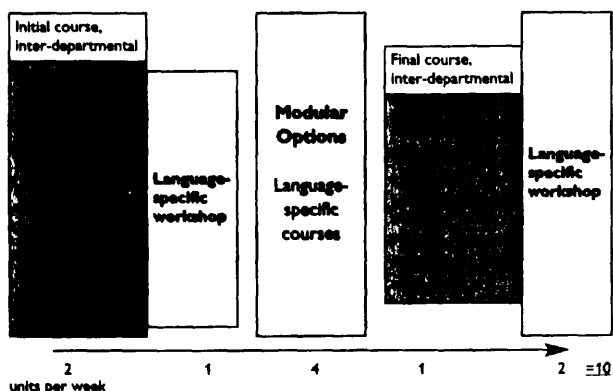


Figure 2: Overview of the Syllabus

The initial course includes sessions on the following (see Figure 3 below):

- Introduction: reflecting on participants' roles as language learners and on experiences with language teachers, using a language learning biography – a form which consists of the following three tasks:

- 1 Try to identify similarities and differences in how you acquired your mother tongue and your foreign language(s).
- 2 Which of your own language learning strategies have proved particularly effective?
- 3 Which teaching techniques were more helpful in your language learning, which less?

Students complete the form before admission to the course. The various responses to question 3 are dealt with in this introductory session.

- Language acquisition and language learning: the various responses to tasks 1 and 2 in the language learning biography are reflected in this session and linked to language acquisition theories, such as behaviourist, nativist, interactional/intercultural and psycholinguistic approaches. Brief references to specific foreign language methods— e.g., audio-lingual approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), etc. are highlighted in order for students to see the acquisition theory behind them.

- Traditional and humanistic approaches to foreign language learning are presented chronologically, starting with grammar/translation, deductive approach, audio-lingual approach all the way through to humanistic approaches, including Suggestopedia and TPR.

- Integrating basic skills (receptive: listening, viewing, reading; productive: speaking, writing, creating spoken and written texts): the approach is illustrated by an integrated lesson, based on a 'jazz chant', the song "Tom's Diner" by Suzanne Vega. The session also considers sub-skills (e.g. the inter-relationship of skimming and scanning), while the macro-skill of thinking is given due prominence.

- Council of Europe: Common European Framework, as reflected in the new curriculum for the Austrian *AHS-Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule* (secondary grammar school): aims, objectives and functions; levels; 'can do'-statements; communicative competences.

- Multilingualism in the foreign language classroom: the impact of metalinguistic knowledge and language awareness in the acquisition and learning of multiple languages, multilingual vocabulary learning strategies, the multilingual mental lexicon, cognitive and neuropsychological aspects of processing multiple languages.

- Learner autonomy, learning strategies and self-assessment: the session looks at the rationale of study competence, with examples of learning approaches, from mind-mapping to project work.

- Motivation in the foreign language classroom: reflecting the various forms of motivation (intrinsic/extrinsic, integrative/instrumental, individual/group-specific) and their theoretical backgrounds (socio-educational model, psychological models, cognitive and neurolinguistic models), as well as a wide range of motivational strategies in the foreign language classroom.
- Media and new technology: with hands-on experience in the computer lab, reflecting the use of the internet and e-learning in the foreign language classroom, while analyzing critically ready-made programs for the various languages (e.g., e-learning, materials to supplement course books, webquests, etc.).
- Curriculum and syllabus design: from structural-situational via functional/notional and communicative, through to task-based and lexical syllabuses.
- Lesson planning: aims and objectives, learner-centred lessons, flexible approaches, ten steps to developing a lesson plan; process and product.
- Panel discussion: roles and status of language teachers; course evaluation.

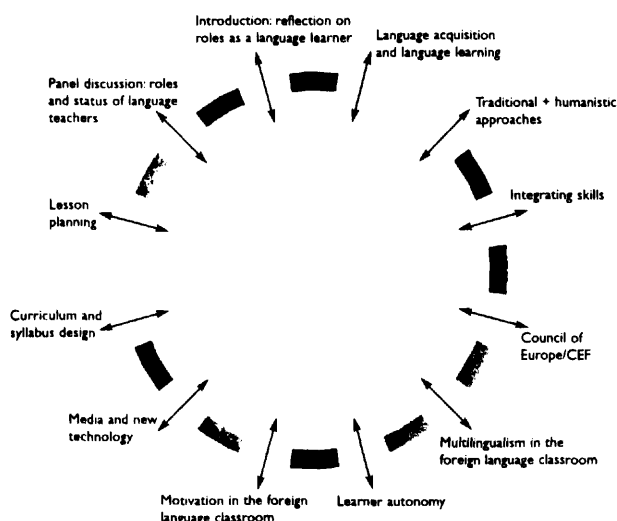


Figure 3: Introduction to the Teaching of Foreign Languages

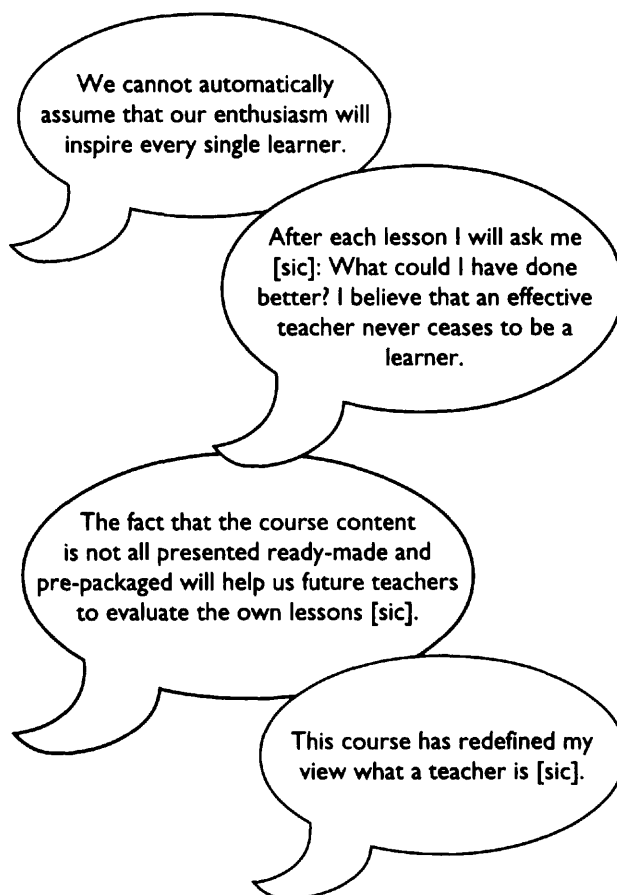
The final part consists of a one-hour integrated course on testing, evaluating and assessing, followed up by a two-hour language-specific workshop. Areas covered include principles of communicative testing, the various forms of *Schularbeiten* (progress or achievement – and performance tests) and the Matura (school-leaving proficiency exam), the rationale of using portfolios for self-assessment, error analysis, and profiling – all with reference to international certificates.

Assessing student progress

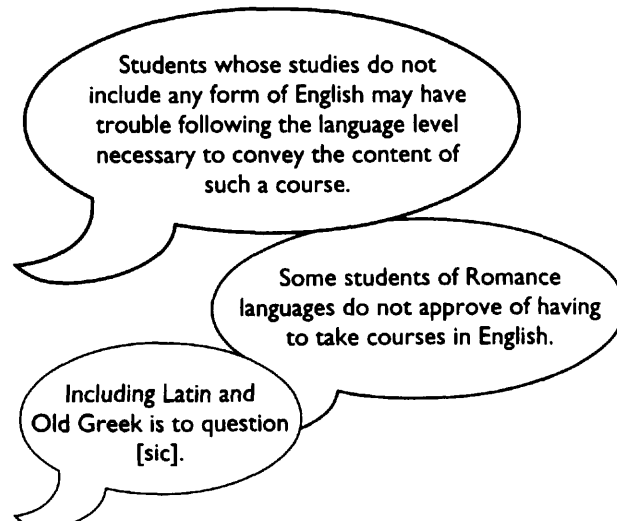
In a reflective approach to teacher education, trainees are encouraged to reflect on input sessions and on their own practice in the initial and final courses. To help this process, each trainee uses a professional growth portfolio throughout the initial and final courses. This is a dossier of

materials and accompanying evidence that the trainee has reflected on the sessions and come to understand the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice. It shows what the trainee has learnt and achieved, and how the learning has – hopefully – taken place in an upward spiral. The portfolio should illustrate that trainees are aware of their own learning process and development as prospective teachers, and that they are able to reflect in-depth and demonstrate that process.

Taken from students' portfolios, these are a selection of comments:



While such student comments are supportive, the ones that are really useful are those touching on such problem issues as:



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In addressing these issues, we have partly resolved some of the problems through negotiating with students the form of the tasks for the portfolio. For example, one task in the portfolio invites two or more students from different languages to focus on one common task. They can present this task either bilingually or even trilingually.

Students are required to offer their portfolio for assessment. They also need to submit a letter of self-assessment, in which they justify the mark they feel they deserve for their term's work. Apart from the self-assessment, two trainers also confer in analysing the work submitted. Assessment criteria include the quality of professional presentation; clarity (structure and coherence); creativity and originality; critical self-reflection; amount of background knowledge and how it has been processed critically; extra assignments; definition of roles as prospective teachers; and mission statements for the trainee's future professional career.

Conclusion

The Innsbruck Model already goes some considerable way to reflecting an important aspect of teaching in the foreign language classroom, namely generating synergy through cooperation. This is experienced through an open forum, where ideas are exchanged between students and between students and staff, and then discussed critically. In each session one lecturer takes the lead in opening up the ground to be covered, while other lecturers are encouraged to join in with running comments where appropriate. Where students are exposed to team teaching in other sessions, certain guidelines are offered as to how team teaching can be practised in school (*Lernen am Modell* – 'model learning' or 'imitation learning').

In short, students do learn through their own experience in their interaction with students studying other foreign languages. Interdisciplinary cooperation does take place through contributions and comments by the various students, both in sessions and through the portfolio. Students are sensitised towards aspects of multilingual language learning and teaching. In addition, constant feedback is encouraged throughout the joint courses. Indeed, any process of change requires constant monitoring both of student progress and trainer development as a team.

Ultimately, by receiving from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture the European Label for Innovative Projects in Language Teaching and Learning in 2002, the Innsbruck Model has been acknowledged as worth looking at by other universities. The University of Innsbruck, through its Study Group on Quality Assurance in Teaching, has also shown its appreciation by offering substantial subsidies. Even so, we still consider the project as work-in-progress.

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