

# *Breaking barriers in language learning*

Linda Parker



'The ability to understand and communicate in other languages is a right and a basic skill for all European citizens'

*Commission of the European Communities (2003) Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006*



# 2005

The Commission's long-term objective is to increase individual multilingualism until every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue.

**A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism, 2005**



# The typical confident linguist

- \* is young
- \* is well educated
- \* comes from a multi-lingual background
- \* learned foreign languages in school



# Why bother?

*“Our clients have enough to deal with  
- they can’t take on learning a foreign  
language on top of everything else.”*



# Prejudice

*“They can’t speak ..... properly”*

- \* Attitudes and previous experiences
- \* Fear of the unknown
- \* Provision

*Difficulty of access, cost, methodology*



# Three projects –12 years



**Meet our learners.....**



Uwe, Germany







Stacie, UK





## Josef, Czech Republic





Steve, Nottingham

Her Majesty's  
Prison, Nottingham



# Goals

- \* **To convince** both decision makers and those who work with marginalised and excluded groups on the ground, of the value of learning foreign languages
- \* **To develop approaches** to language learning which are suitable for and likely to engage the end-user





# Ambitious aims

- \* To bring language learning to excluded groups
- \* To take language teaching out of institutions into the heart of communities
- \* To convince those who work in other fields that language learning is worthwhile



# Simple messages

- \* Everyone has a right to learn languages
- \* Everyone can benefit from language learning experiences



# Project partners

## **Universities**

- Nottingham Trent University, UK
- University of Castilla La Mancha, ES
- University of South Bohemia, CZ

## **Specialists in adult and community education**

- Slovenian Institute of Adult Education, SL
- Frit Oplysnings Forbund, DK
- Association de Gestion du Reseau des Centres de Langues des CCI, FR
- Euroed Centre, RO
- Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives (FICE), AU

## **Specialists in learning disability**

- Gemeinnutzige Schottener Reha, DE

## **Publisher**

- Cambridge University Press, HU

## **Professional association**

- Association for Language Learning, UK



# Quality assurance

## Expert evaluators

- \* Social and community work
- \* Language teaching, learning and promotion





# To break barriers.....

## We worked with.....



# People in difficult social and economic circumstances

- \* Unemployed
- \* Asylum seekers
- \* Recovering addicts
- \* Single mothers
- \* Prisoners
- \* Nursery staff and children in inner cities



# Those with physical disability

- \* Visually impaired
- \* Hearing impaired
- \* War victims
- \* Accident victims
- \* Senior citizens with disabilities
- \* Stroke victims



# Those with learning disabilities

- \* Down syndrome
- \* Autism
- \* Range of other learning disabilities



# How we've worked

- \* Small is beautiful
- \* Local projects
- \* Developed a model of cross-sectoral collaboration and joint interventions



# Methodology

- \* Simple, easily accessible activities
- \* Close cooperation with the experts in the field
- \* Targeted approaches and methods: flexible and learner-centred
- \* Working from interests/experiences of learners
- \* Strong elements of enjoyment and fun
- \* Strong cultural elements



# Regional Society for Blind and Visually Impaired, Slovenia

- \* To learn about Italian culture and its characteristics
- \* To learn the basics of the Italian language
- \* To understand the lyrics of some Italian songs
- \* To visit Venice.
- \* To present their knowledge and their activities to other members of the Society
- \* To write an article about their work and publish it in national daily newspaper.



# Activities

Short taster sessions to longer term experiences

- \* Cultural days
- \* Dance
- \* Song
- \* Cookery
- \* New technologies
- \* Study circles





# Benefits for learners

*“Pupils can operate in a foreign language at the same conceptual and linguistic level as in their own language”  
(Hilary McColl)*

- \* Language development
- \* Social development
- \* Improved cultural awareness



# Voice of experience



# University teacher

“ I have really enjoyed the opportunity to work in an atmosphere of mutual respect with enthusiastic and well-motivated learners”

Cecilia, Italian teacher,  
Her Majesty's Prison, Nottingham



# Student teacher

“ All learners were able to concentrate for 90 minutes, and were very excited and enthusiastic. They were all highly motivated, for them language learning was a link with the wider world. All learners were curious, sensitive, communicative, sociable and competitive”

Comments by a teacher in a centre for adults with learning difficulties in the Czech Republic



# VIVACE Partner

“ I was really unsure about how much success we would have in this project but it has far exceeded my expectations. It has been one of the most valuable and moving experiences of my career”

Lucie B, Professor,  
University of South Bohemia, CZ



# Language learning has a positive effect on:

- \* Self-esteem
- \* Confidence
- \* Communication skills
- \* Social skills
- \* Wider world view
- \* More tolerant attitudes
- \* More positive attitudes towards education



# Impact

- \* On learners
- \* On teachers
- \* On other organisations
- \* On wider community

[www.codaproject.eu](http://www.codaproject.eu)



# Which language should we teach?

- \* Political correctness
- \* Issues of equality
- \* English is not enough, but...
- \* The Spanish phenomenon in the UK
- \* Can we use English as a support for multilingualism rather than a threat to it?





# What we've learnt about disadvantage

- \* Disadvantage is not always obvious
- \* Disability does not necessarily equal disadvantage – and vice versa
- \* Disadvantage varies from culture to culture



# Success

- Three European Awards for Languages, 2005
- 10 best practices in Europe, 2005
- Lifelong Learning Prize, 2007

Real success is the impact on those involved – learners, teachers, project promoters, partners and wide range of other professionals



# The statistics

- \* 11 partner organisations in 10 countries
- 50 agencies and organisations outside the field of language teaching
- More than 120 language learning activities
- Over 800 learners, varying in age from 3 to 85
- Spanish, French, German, Italian, English, Dutch, Swedish, Polish.



# On the ground

- \* Culture of open-mindedness
- \* Cooperation between professionals in different fields is a powerful tool
- \* Time for confident relationships to develop
- \* Support from senior management in the target organisations
- \* Understanding of one another's culture
- \* Involving all stakeholders in planning, including learners where possible
- \* Continuing oversight and support – project framework



# But....

- \* Difficult to sustain (without dedicated funds)
- \* For adult learners it is not easy to reach decision makers in the social care sector as a whole
- \* Little emphasis on this type of provision and pedagogy in subject-specific teacher education
- \* Current economic/political climate not conducive to innovation of this kind in schools or adult learning
- \* It's a case which needs to be made constantly



We were right to bother?

**YES WE WERE!**



# We have demonstrated...

Language is the path to understanding other ways of living, which in turn opens up the space for intercultural tolerance

*Europeans and their Languages, 2006*

“People...should be given the opportunity to open up bridges between their **internal** world and the **wider community.**”



*Langsen project , Council of Europe, 2004-2007*

# Breaking barriers...

- \*Needs flexibility
- \*Takes time
- \*Requires investment





# Grand aims

- \* “To convince those who work in other fields that language learning is worthwhile”
- \* “To raise awareness about the benefits of languages for all among representatives of national, regional and local education authorities”
- \* “To have an impact on policy at European and national levels”



In conclusion....

We made a difference

We told the story

Much remains to be done

People make things happen



# Margaret Mead

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

