The Book Project “GuidE To ALL Languages – GETALL”

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Introduction

GETALL (A GuidE To ALL Languages) is a radical methodology based on the many ways people have always used to learn languages. The purpose is to help Europeans to feel free to use a second (and more) foreign languages. The GETALL project will produce a textbook and a website guiding users to become autonomous learners. They will be guided to discover, use and build their own learning strategies. They will be guided to authentic situated materials, rich in context, so as to be able to use previous familiarity and interest as reference. They will be concentrating on competences, not knowledge.

GETALL guides learners to use their competences in the languages they know with a view to applying them on new languages, always concentrating on the similarities and avoiding the differences. For this reason GETALL targets more than one second foreign language, since the competencies can be reused in other languages, thus preparing learners for a flexible but little known future. Teachers will not provide materials, but tasks, guiding learners to what they want to work with and what is suitable for their level. Using language is a social and cognitive human behaviour for communication. Hence, there must be intention, interest, needs, curiosity, pleasure, sharing, and practical use for it to take place naturally. All of this is well-known, but nevertheless not enough used in European schools, and, therefore, not enough used by EU citizens in their life-long learning.

The GETALL products will be tested, revised, quality guaranteed, and will reach large audiences. They will inspire and guide learners of various ages to their own strategies and help them build self-confidence. The rich European cultural and linguistic heritage will be made more available, more attractive, and stronger. Europeans will have better access to useful information and contacts in other countries, not only European.

Background

The European Union has stated clearly that “Improving foreign language learning is essential if Europe is to achieve its potential, be it economic, cultural or social” and that “Individual
motivation to learn and a variety of learning opportunities are the ultimate keys to implementing lifelong learning successfully." (European Education Council, 2001)

Hence it is one of EU’s objectives “to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age” (European Council, 2002) The Eurobarometer (2006) states that the share of Europeans who can use two foreign languages has gone up from 26 to 28 % since 2001. Many forces are driving people to learn foreign languages, but education could do more to help. The Eurydice report (2005) states that less than 50 % of lower secondary school pupils learn a second foreign language.

Of course many people learn foreign languages outside school. We believe that school learning too much emphasises knowledge of foreign languages at the expense of competence in them. The concept of partial competencies is not often mentioned, however important it is. The step to “knowing a language” is kept unnecessarily high, thus excluding many pupils from enjoying the fact that they actually can understand bits and pieces from many languages, and with a bit of guidance could expand their competencies.

This would counteract the trend that the increasing international communication is often run in English, also when that puts constraints on communication that could have been managed in closely related native languages, where the parties would have been freer to express themselves. The amount of information available to people is increasing very quickly (e.g. on the Internet) but not mostly in English. For EU enterprises to have access to the information they need to stay competitive, they need people who are willing and able to understand information in their field in more languages.

The next step then (besides more expertise) will be increased cultural understanding and with that follows the ability to entertain customer relations much more successfully. By only using a *lingua franca* the deeper qualities in interpersonal communication are often lost, and there is a real risk that people will start to forget about the other languages and cultures of the EU and of the world (in a way resembling how we feel when our country is mistaken for another one, and that it doesn’t make a real difference to anybody….) Now is the time for a new methodology of learning languages. With every per cent of Europeans thinking they are able to use the languages of other countries, the benefits of improved communication will be tenfold.
Aims and objectives

It is the aim of the GETALL project to promote linguistic and cultural diversity by presenting and teaching methods for the target groups to LEARN how to LEARN languages through their own activity. Language is social and cognitive at the same time – a means of achieving personal goals, both practical, social, psychological, and pleasure oriented. The GETALL project addresses the present situation mainly in two ways: The first is by anchoring all activities in clearly defined situations and in the interests and intentions of the students, using their knowledge and skills in the subject matter as a powerful tool to decode foreign language (very much the same way we decode our native languages in fact). The second way is by setting up favourable conditions for learning how to find and use similarities in vocabulary and structure between languages, i.e. Intercomprehension. Here the GETALL project emphasises the pluralistic approach to languages, not confining strategy learning to only one target language.

The very strong ideas of what we can understand prevent us from trying to understand. This will be the main obstacle to overcome. The GETALL project aims at doing that by allowing students to prove to themselves that they actually have all that it takes to understand situated language expressions, because simply telling people will not be enough. Initially students will have to be conditioned by reinforcement outside the actual pleasure of understanding and starting to be able to produce a second foreign language, but soon the students’ own intentions will be enough to drive the continued learning.

The target languages are DE, FR, and ES, chosen because they are the most common second foreign languages, and the less widely taught PT, SV, FI, and BG, but references will be made to many more languages, because at the core of the methodology lies the assumption that the competencies are very much the same in all languages, and much of the knowledge one acquires can be reused in other related languages. The secondary school level is chosen since that is where most children start to learn a second foreign language. The aim of setting up a website is to reach out to young adults in mobility situations in a way that makes maximum use out of new innovations in the field of web applications which is likely to appeal to the target groups and to be efficient in putting learners in contact with materials that are highly motivating for study.
Procedure

• *Learning strategies*
GETALL offers ways to seriously move towards the goals set by the EU as the main aim is learning strategies to learn any language. Therefore the language courses are not limited to one language, as the case is in most courses, thereby also allowing for discovering how many languages have similar structures. GETALL stresses competence, not knowledge of languages, as competence can be achieved through different strategies in different individuals. GETALL works with situations that are full of known circumstances and uses authentic materials for training competencies, because that is what learners will have access to in their life-long learning. GETALL insists on student activity as a basis for the learning, regarding the personal intentions and interests as necessary for efficient learning. Making mistakes is what happens when people are learning new things, and the mistakes are powerful steps on the way to competence (Pencheva & Shopov, 2003). The combined impact of these pedagogic efforts will lead to a higher number of learners who actually start to use the foreign languages they work with in the courses. Using languages will lead to continued learning after the course and a positive attitude to life-long learning. Contentment with partial competence will lead to natural curiosity without feelings of inadequacy, also opening up for people from families without traditions of longer studies to use the increasing presence of foreign languages for their own purposes.

• *Target groups*
One target group is secondary school students, aged 13 – 17, i.e. the age when most children will start to study a second foreign language (2FL). In this situation a lot is at stake. If English was their first foreign language, many will have experienced success in their efforts, thanks to its ubiquitous presence in many EU member states. It is then easy that the 2FL will be perceived as a purely intellectual enterprise – possibly also an activity that cements the borderlines between the social classes. It will be the students who come from families who actively support their learning and actively seek extra-linguistic stimulation for them (e.g. visiting the countries where the language is spoken) that will manage to benefit from the teaching in today’s schools in Europe. Secondary school students love role models and exciting new ways to express, discover, and define themselves – a drive which hardly can be over-estimated. Why not use the means that modern technology and globalisation/migration offers? As children they will not have lost their initiative to generate play and activities. By
harnessing this personal and pleasure-oriented attitude – and by reinforcing social and
cognitive behaviours in sharing situations – expressions in the foreign language will become
interesting to explore. The project also aims at showing how to go about seeing and
understanding things that actually are easy in the target language for users of the source
language in question.

The other target group is of young adults such as exchange students and international trainees
(e.g. Erasmus and Leonardo students), jobseekers, and border region citizens, all of which are
or could be exposed to foreign language in a powerful way. It is unnecessary and tragic if
these groups main language learning outcome from their experience only will be improved
English. Europe then is losing some of the potential gains of its investment in initiatives and
jobseekers and border region citizens will not be able to access the resources that lie within
their reach. The website planned for these groups will try to convince the target groups that
they will gain many benefits from starting to use and train their capacities to understand the
foreign language they are facing, one being an improved social situation during their sojourn.

- **Long-term benefits**

In a longer perspective the target groups will continue to benefit from the behaviour that
GETALL wishes to promote, as long as they can resist the power of the traditional outlooks
on language learning, and remember how to learn through their own activity. As the teachers
who get involved work very close to one of the target groups, new groups of secondary school
students will be reached. The idea is that the benefits experienced will reinforce a winning
behaviour and that by communication with other cultures a greater awareness and
appreciation will be reached of one’s own culture and language – thus providing a better basis
for cooperation across borders. As for exchange students and international trainees, they find
themselves in a situation where they undergo profound changes in their worldview and
outlook on people. It is likely that their acquisition of a second foreign language through their
own efforts and intentions – the GETALL way – will remain an inspiration all their lives.
Since they are likely future leaders they can be expected to influence their organisations, so
that they will have a more positive and modern outlook on learning new languages and that
they will be able to see the obvious benefits for their organisation of tapping into the riches of
other cultures.

- **Testing**
The secondary school learners will be tested as to their competence, partial or not, at the end of the first three semesters. The learners who participate in the GETALL project will be compared to groups who are not. That way both short term and longer term effects can be studied. In addition, the testing will be supervised by the university partners and followed up by interviews and questionnaires of students and teachers. The website will contain a visitor counter and a registration page, so that profiles of users might be set up. Furthermore, there will be web based questionnaires, and interviews will be carried out among website users who are available for such.

- **Didactic approaches**
  The methodological approach is that of combining: a) a strong emphasis on students’ own emotions, intentions, activity and understanding, b) use of the ever present similarities between European languages (both loanwords and common roots), c) avoiding the introduction of elements of language where there are difficult differences where that is possible, d) efforts to counteract mental obstacles to learning in students, such as self-image, social exclusion, and traditional notions about what language studies should be like, e) a concentration on materials that are motivating to young students who have strong needs to explore youth culture, role models, and interests in art, science, sports, music, etc. (Carlsson, 2002), f) insisting on students sharing ideas and questions in the group (Rogoff, 1990), g) not limiting studies to just one language, but instead fostering strategies of how to use and understand any language through textual and situational cues that learners already possess the ability to use since they already know two languages.

- **Diversity of languages**
  Obviously the project will enhance diversity of languages by opening up ways for more people to use the various languages. At first, it will be mainly by drawing information and entertainment from sources of information. Later on, it will be by engaging in communication in the second and maybe third foreign languages the learners have experienced positive reinforcement from when trying to come to terms with them. GETALL emphasises not limiting oneself to a separate language, but it stresses the similarities among languages and human communication in all countries. Young learners will realise that what interests them is also interesting to young people in other European countries and can be understood by using and exercising strategies that learners already possess.
• **Innovative aspects**

The innovative aspects of the GETALL project lie in its insistence on competence over knowledge, its encouraging learners to use the languages only for what is motivating to them, thus allowing learners to make use of their prior knowledge of the genres and subject matters and their already existing strategies of making sense of the world. Making sense of a text is very much a special case of making sense of the world (Beaugrande, 1980). It is only in this situation that GETALL aims at facilitating using purely linguistic cues, such as similarities in vocabulary and structure, as a means of making decoding ever easier. It will be done, so that the learners discover them, not that the teachers explain them, because that is what will lead to positive attitudes, self-esteem and continued learning after school.

The way GETALL will work pedagogically will make young learners see the use of working with words and sentences clearer than in traditional language teaching. This will open for learners from families with lower interest in literacy practices to stay interested and discover their abilities. The various skills that communication requires and also trains will be pure means for the communication to work. Hence mistakes will be considered as steps on the learning path. One strategy the GETALL project aims at training is that of finding and using information oneself, not allowing learners to sit back and let teachers run the process. It has to be the learners’ intentions that drive the process. The pedagogy of GETALL stresses the importance of the students being the ones who find the ways to understand languages – because it is the objective to give the learners the confidence that they are able to do so. Therefore, teachers are expected to ask rather than explain, apart from being in charge of the organisation of the group’s work. This is development of reflection on a higher level than what language courses usually reach.

As for the website the same pedagogic ideas are the guidelines. The site will guide users to ways in which they will discover how they are able to understand something. Initially, it will be only partly and often incorrectly. The website will make it clear, however, that this type of understanding is not a failure, but a step forward. Didn’t the user first think it would be impossible? And yet s/he managed to understand something. The aim is to make users continue doing this kind of exercises for a long time, perhaps as an aspect of life-long learning. The point is that GETALL aims at teaching behaviour, not knowledge. This behaviour, once it is in place, will bring linguistic competence to the users. The condition is that they will have fun and find the activity useful as they practise it.
**Partners**

The consortium that wants to do the development work outlined here is composed of universities and secondary schools. We have wanted to collect expertise in the field of intercomprehension and new approaches to language learning (development of partial competencies, focussed on intercultural skills and task-based learning according to the Common European Framework for Languages). All the university experts have been working together in this field and in other European projects. The secondary schools were recruited on the basis of motivation and capacity to innovate. The publisher has a long experience of creating innovative textbooks in French and Spanish and has wanted to engage in this innovative way of learning how to learn foreign languages.

**Expected reach to target groups**

The expected continued visibility of the outcomes, i.e. the textbook and the website, will lead to some ten thousand pupils using the method and some hundred thousand young adults being guided by the website. As to the textbook for secondary school the publishing house sees it as a part of its regular activity. It will promote and sell it. The product will be already tested, and the publisher will as a partner have a lot of ways to ensure that the quality will be high and full insight in the production process. Through the networks etc. of the project partners the products will be promoted as well. As for the website, it will be of use for other EU initiatives, notably within the LLP programme, so it is expected that they will be promoted through the Erasmus and Leonardo sub-programmes. Also, since GETALL is addressing an employability factor, it is expected that employment offices will promote the website.

**Conclusion**

Who has not experienced the smile of host nationals when addressed by visitors in their own language? The demonstration of interest and respect for the culture and humanity expressed that way is a lot different from the instrumental use of a lingua franca. Europe will benefit from its citizens realising that, with small and reasonable efforts, they will be able to access resources and quality of life in other countries – resources that, otherwise, might remain unused, since it sometimes takes an outsider to appreciate the value of things. It is the aim of GETALL to help Europeans to discover more of Europe’s social and cultural heritage and to appreciate the knowledge and values that it contains. Information available in foreign languages can be accessed in its original form and on a wider scale, than the fraction of it that can be altered into a lingua franca. Communication will be improved by organisations and
people feeling capable and free to use their abilities to understand and learn from other countries without professional assistance by experts and schools. These can stay lucrative businesses partly by continuing to place their clients in a role of dependency to them, since the traditional learner role is to wait for instructions and materials. However, in many professional and special interest situations, the knowledge of the subject matter is more important than language skills to access complicated information, which can be very useful.

The timing is right for GETALL: It is the signal to send to young Europeans today that the culture that the English language brings in its train is not the only acceptable and interesting life style, but that other countries have superb role models and youth culture and sports. At the same time that very uniformity that we call Anglo-Saxon influence is helping the same young people to bond with foreigners with the same interests and lifestyle. That makes learning languages easier, because if the differences in possible meanings are reduced, and the number of loanwords and references to known features has gone up, then the guesswork when it comes to the meaning of the remaining words will be easier.

References

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Abstract

The EU objective that all Europeans learn at least two foreign languages needs new pedagogic ideas to become reality. The human mind works best in lifelike situations. If there is interest, there will be energy and concentration – in real context. The verbal aspect of languages can also be easy, if similarities with already known languages are taken into account. The aim of the book is to help students:

- discover new strategies to approach a foreign language
- reflect on their own ways to learn a language
- actively use their existing communicative competences
- acknowledge that learning often takes place outside of one’s awareness
- develop intercomprehension skills
- feel the pleasure of discovering a language
A guide book or travel guide is "a book of information about a place designed for the use of visitors or tourists". It will usually include information about sights, accommodation, restaurants, transportation, and activities. Maps of varying detail and historical and cultural information are often included. Different kinds of guide books exist, focusing on different aspects of travel, from adventure travel to relaxation, or aimed at travelers with different incomes, or focusing on sexual orientation GETALL (A GuidE To ALL Languages) is a radical methodology based on the many ways people have always used to learn languages. The purpose is to help Europeans to feel free to use a second (and more) foreign languages. The GETALL project will produce a textbook and a website guiding users to become autonomous learners. They will be guided to discover, use and build their own learning strategies. They will be guided to authentic situated materials rich in context, so as to be able to use previous familiarity and interest as reference. They will be concentrating on competences, not knowledge. GET...