

LACS

Language associations and collaborative support

Terry Lamb

Abstract The «Language associations and collaborative support» (LACS) is a project of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML, a Council of Europe institution) that aims at supporting the work of language teacher associations in Europe and across the globe. It produced a handbook for language teacher associations and is now promoting actions and organising regional events for the period 2012-2015 in order to encourage the activities of language organisations.

Contents 1. LACS. — 2. Aims. — 3. Who. — 4. The handbook. — 5. The next steps

1 LACS

LACS is a project of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), a Council of Europe institution based in Graz promoting excellence in language education in its 34 member states (<http://www.ecml.at/>).

It originated in the ECML 2008-2011 programme *Empowering language professionals*, which in this project means not only those who work in schools and training institutions, but those who work to support the profession in language teacher associations.

Dissemination is the key word when it comes to bridging the gap between ECML projects/publications and the implementation of the material in practice. Experience shows that experts from member states need sustained support from the ECML in order to fully develop their multiplying function. This project targets regional ECML multipliers in order to build up, support and sustain regional networks engaging in, adapting and implementing the results of ECML work, paving the way from innovation to sustainability.

The LACS Project aims at supporting the work of language teacher associations in Europe and beyond. The project is now in its second term: LACS/1 ended in 2011, LACS/2 will go on at least until 2015.

2 Aims

The central idea is that through collaboration, whether with other teachers, other associations, other organisations and institutions, or policy makers, there is increased access to support, whether the focus is on teaching, teacher training, curriculum development, research, administration, or political impact.

Support comes from shared ideas and strategies, from access to additional sources of funding, and from enhanced contact with a broad spectrum of other teachers, learners, language teacher associations and other organisations (such as the ECML) around the world. It also comes from more effective dissemination of new language pedagogies, including teaching and learning methodologies as well as language policies and curricular models appropriate to the 21st century.

The specific project objectives of LACS/1 were defined as follows:

- a. to disseminate to a wide European audience (and beyond) innovative and effective developments and projects, initially focused around the work carried out under the auspices of ECML;
- b. to map the ways in which a wide range of language teacher associations are organised (nationally, regionally and locally) in order to support their own networks of members through practical interventions (workshops, publications, newsletters, websites and web fora etc.) as well as through opportunities to influence policy towards the development of a vibrant, high quality and inclusive environment in which multilingualism can flourish;
- c. to create spaces in which associations can interact, both face to face and virtually, in order to optimise the impact of their efforts;
- d. to produce materials to support language teacher associations in the review and development of their own working structures and processes.

The LACS/1 Project identified the need to consider two issues when engaging in dissemination of ECML work, whether it focuses on innovative pedagogical approaches in foreign languages classrooms or support for migrant/regional/minority language education: firstly, the need for mediation of projects in order to engage teachers from member countries in actively exploring their potential contribution to classroom practice within local and national contexts, relating the theoretical dimensions to practice and adapting the generic elements in order to increase their relevance within a different education system; secondly, the need for speedy and interactive communication, which would afford rapid communication of news from other associations and from the ECML, and which would allow discussion and therefore deeper understanding of the issues under consideration.

In addition, in line with Council of Europe language policy development, the need was identified to encourage collaboration between organisations, including teacher associations, engaged in different aspects of language education, in order to address **all** elements of the Council's vision of plurilingual and multilingual education, encompassing not only foreign modern languages but also the languages of schooling. The aim was to encourage collaboration amongst all teachers engaged in specialist language teaching (including those supporting teachers of other subjects in developing their linguistic awareness) was also a recommendation of the MARILLE Project.

LACS/2 was therefore developed as part of the 2012-2015 programme, *Learning through languages*, with the aims of using LACS/FIPLV tools (beginning with blogs and Twitter) and regional seminars, firstly to develop regional networks of diverse language associations and in-service training providers, secondly to explore regional applications of all aspects of ECML work, and thirdly to encourage collaboration amongst all teachers engaged in developing different aspects of learners' language needs.

3 Who

LACS/1 was coordinated by three major international federations of language teacher associations:

1. FIPLV (the International Federation of Language Teacher Associations), the hub of a wide range of member and associated organisations and institutions; FIPLV is still involved in LACS/2;
2. FIPF (the International Federation of French Teachers), that brings together over 80,000 teachers of French;
3. IDV (the International Association of German Teachers), similarly represents the interests of some 250,000 teachers of German through approximately 100 teacher associations in 85 countries.

LACS/2 has a simpler structure:

- a. it is based on a team of four people, Terry Lamb (coordinator, University of Sheffield), Daniel Xerri (University of Malta), Sigurborg Jónsdóttir (FIPLV Nordic-Baltic Region, from Iceland), Nadezhda Doychinova («A.S. Popov» secondary school, Bulgaria);
- b. there are three associate partners, Sarah Breslin, Director of SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages, Wendy Carr, EdD, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, and FIPLV, Italy, represented by Paolo Balboni (Vice President) and by its Communications Officers, Tatjana Atanasoska and Goran Vodicka.

4 The handbook

A major outcome of LACS is the publication *Learning from each other: A handbook for language teacher associations*, which can be downloaded at <http://lacs.ecml.at/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=XpeoCoGK0VU%3d&abid=3111&language=en-GB>.

The publication is aimed at those involved in the running of language teacher associations at international, national, regional and local levels. This may include paid employees or, more frequently, volunteers. It provides guidance on the effective running and networking of associations and encourages language teacher associations to collaborate in order to support teachers more effectively, and to contribute to improvements in the quality of language teaching. It also enables language teachers across the world to share their own ideas, to be involved in research, and to learn about the cutting-edge work of the ECML and its European projects.

The draft of the publication is open for discussion in the LACS website. The publication is currently available in English and German. The French version will be available shortly.

The structure of the *Handbook* is:

1. Definition of a language teacher association
2. Rationale for membership of a language teacher association
3. Member recruitment and retention activities and resource
4. Dissemination through events Association websites
5. Publications
6. Involvement in policy
7. Involvement in research
8. Fundraising activities
9. Useful collaboration
10. Evaluation

5 The next steps

LACS/2 is working on six work packages for the period 2012-2015:

1. production of a Directory of associations and other language organisations; these will be searchable and on the project website, and serve as a communications tool for the project and the public; the research is currently being carried out through regional audit;
2. development of a multimedia communications strategy, with some of these media facilitating statistical monitoring too; these will be used to promote ECML as a whole, past and present programmes, and specific projects on a rolling basis;

3. at least four regional events, each specifically designed to be of relevance to the region;
4. case studies of activities in different countries/regions, to illustrate ways in which ECML projects are being used and having an impact; these will include information on how projects have been adapted;
5. guidance on how to adapt projects to different contexts;
6. continued encouragement of language associations and organisations to collaborate and share (following the first LACS project).