

# ONLINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING. RESOURCES AND TOOLS IN SUPPORT OF TEACHERS OFFICE INTERACTORS, LAPROF, LET'S GO PROJECTS

## PREDAREA ONLINE A LIMBILOR STRĂINE. RESURSE ȘI INSTRUMENTE DE LUCRU PENTRU ASISTAREA PROFESORILOR OFFICE INTERACTORS, LAPROF, LET'S GO PROJECTS

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**Abstract.** *The article aims to present a series of guidelines, tools and resources meant to assist foreign language teachers in going online. The authors believe that familiarization with ICT tools and online learning resources is still a step to be taken by many teachers of foreign languages. The importance of this issue becomes even more apparent when we think of today's learners: most of them are ICT literate, highly capable of handling computers, and attracted by the online environment. In order to meet the learners' expectations, teachers need to adapt to the realities of the present, and be aware and capable of using state-of-the-art technologies and resources.*

**Key words:** blended learning, ICT tools, foreign languages, intercultural communication

**Rezumat.** *Lucrarea prezintă o serie de indicații, instrumente și resurse al caror scop este asistarea profesorilor de limbi străine care doresc să folosească predarea online. Autorii acestei lucrări consideră că deprinderea de aptitudini în zona de tehnologia comunicării este un pas pe care mulți profesori încă trebuie să îl facă. Importanța acestei situații este și mai evidentă atunci când privim lucrurile din perspectiva studentului de astăzi: familiarizat cu lucrul pe calculator, atras de materialele online și de noile media. Pentru a întâmpina cu succes așteptările studenților, profesorii trebuie să se adapteze realităților prezente și să devină capabili să utilizeze tehnologii și resurse inovative.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** învățare mixtă, unelte ICT, limbi străine, comunicare interculturală

## INTRODUCTION

Experince shows that foreign language teaching/learning means a lot more than simply teaching grammar and vocabulary items. If we want all this information to be delivered in a logical sequence in order to provide authentic opportunities for practising the foreign language, teaching should also include information on the culture of the target countries. In this way, the teaching process will support learning by providing a genuine background for the language

intake. Moreover, the tools for information transfer and processing used nowadays represent key elements which are instrumental in successful teaching and learning. In a world where mobility matters, teaching has to adjust to the needs of different types of "clients". Virtual learning environments do meet this requirement, which explains why they are increasingly used due to their superior accessibility and variety of resources and teaching methods compared to traditional teaching systems.

## METHOD AND MATERIAL

The three European projects presented in this article, i.e. **Office InterActors**, **LaProf** and **Let's go**, have as their primary goal developing and testing teaching and learning resources, which implicitly includes validating and implementing the products with the final beneficiaries – foreign language learners. All the projects have been developed within European partnerships with the direct contribution of all the experts of the projects teams.

**Office InterActors** is a Leonardo da Vinci transfer-of-innovation project which was implemented starting December 2008. The activities of the project are scheduled up until December 2010. The main aim is to create a virtual learning environment via a Moodle platform which can be accessed at [www.euroed.ro/online](http://www.euroed.ro/online) - to access the courses on the platform contact us at [lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro](mailto:lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro). All the materials uploaded target all those interested in the field of business and business administration, no matter if students or experienced professionals or persons who want to re-train.

Another product of this project is the *Office InterActors Kit* which may be accessed free of charge at [www.officeinteractors.eu](http://www.officeinteractors.eu). This kit provides information and details to all those who are interested in running courses based on the Office InterActors methodology. The Office InterActors methodology includes not only teamwork sessions organized at national level (teams set up according to the language competence level – basic or advanced), but also online exercises for international negotiation sessions on the Moodle platform or via Skype.

The activities on the platform are run around a scenario developed by the project team which aims at developing entrepreneurial skills, ICT and less widely used languages skills.

**LaProf** is a multilateral project which undertakes to develop a set of language teaching resources with special attention to the fields of ICT and agriculture. The end-beneficiaries of this project are experts in the afore-mentioned fields who think of emigrating and who therefore need not only a basic knowledge of the foreign language, but also an operational command of specialized terminology. One of the first stages of the project focused on designing a set of exercises whereby learners can get acquainted with both field-specific aspects and relevant culture and civilization elements. By means of an ongoing assessment and updating process, the project proposes high-quality products, flexible and readily adaptable to the needs of the beneficiaries.

Examples of exercise-generating formats are available at:

<http://lefo.net/en/gtests.html?start=1&test=324&path=Fun%2F+Beginners>.

Additionally, a website was created in order to publish information on the working methodology, beneficiaries and final products of the project. This website can be accessed at [www.laprof.eu](http://www.laprof.eu).

In its turn, *Let's go* project evolved from a previous project, LeTS (Language eTeacher Services), which targeted specifically university teachers. Within this

particular project the final outcome was a training pack designed to support teachers in using online teaching/learning materials.

Some of the major aspects covered by these materials are: selection criteria for the ICT technologies used in teaching/learning, using online resources to supplement or substitute traditional courses etc.

The present project *Let's go* focuses on promoting the outcomes of the previous project while extending the list of beneficiaries and adjusting the final products with a view to meeting the needs of pre-university teachers and trainers.

Each partner comes with a team made of teachers and trainers who will also pilot the courses at each and every stage:

- introduction to e-learning
- research and assessing of the online foreign language teaching/learning materials
- planning and developing the online foreign language teaching/learning materials
- efficient use of the online foreign language teaching/learning materials.

Implementing these courses is meant to facilitate updating of LeTS portal as well as further adjustment to the needs of the new categories of beneficiaries.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The three projects, *Office InterActors*, *LaProf* and *Let's go*, are at different stages of implementation and product development. Irrespective of the stage, they clearly uphold and promote European values by integrating a number of priority aspects at European level.

As far as the project *Office InterActors* is concerned the partnership has already run the first series of courses for beneficiaries from 5 countries: Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Romania, and Spain. The second round of Office InterActors courses was scheduled for the spring of 2010, this time facilitated via the Moodle platform [www.euroed.ro/online](http://www.euroed.ro/online). The associated activities will revolve around a newly created scenario developed from the previous one and updated according to the feedback received from beneficiaries, internal and external evaluators, and also from the project partners.

The two trainer training rounds constitute another significant outcome of this project. The first round took place in February 2009, while the second is scheduled on the occasion of the international conference in February 2010.

The three-day event had as its main objective raising participants' awareness of the working methodology and the materials created within the partnership. The first day was dedicated to introducing the Office InterActors partnership and presenting the project outcomes. On the second day, the main focus was on practical activities facilitated by the international facilitators. Those particular activities aimed to provide participants with the opportunity of experiencing hands-on a small part of the Office InterActors course by working on a scenario sequence specially designed for this event. Participants worked in three groups simulating three different countries and the online communication the actual courses involve. Following the conference closure, participants were

invited to take part in post-activities organized on the Office InterActors platform. All those interested in participating in the third round of courses, contact us at [lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro](mailto:lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro).

The **LaProf** partnership conducted a survey of the available literature and materials for the project target groups. The final product of this study, available at <http://www.laprof.eu/viewDeliverables.do> , includes references to methodologies, approaches and materials commonly found in the practice of ICT and agriculture. The batteries of exercises for the end-beneficiaries will be developed on the basis of this material.

**Let's go** project aims to:

- create an online cooperation network made up of 200 pre-university teachers and 100 trainers
- update LeTS portal
- putting together a database of teachers' and trainers' experiences, and assessments of existing materials
- design 10 new mini-courses in the field of online language teaching
- write reports on the use of LeTS portal by students and trainers
- integrate LeTS portal within the national education and training system.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Use of the new language teaching technologies represents an extremely important training opportunity not only for the end-beneficiaries, i.e. students, but also for the trainers teachers.

2. Development and use of these new online technologies have to be regularly updated and adjusted to the needs of the beneficiaries. This has a direct bearing on the relevance of the final results.

3. Piloting, assessing and validating the materials have to be included as compulsory stages within the overall process of developing new materials and skills.

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