

Celebrating Linguistic and Cultural Diversity for 20 years. A Survey of EDL Activities

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*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.
If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.*
(Nelson Mandela)



The European Day of Languages (EDL) was first celebrated on the 26th of September in 2001 during the European Year of Languages. Since then, it has been marked yearly and millions of people in the Council's member states and elsewhere have organized or taken part in activities to promote linguistic diversity. EDL is a chance to celebrate all of Europe's languages, including those that are less spoken and the languages of migrants. Language awareness is seen as a key component of effective communication. It is, in fact, one of the eight key competences in the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning adopted in 2018.

On the occasion of 20 years celebrating linguistic and cultural diversity, me and my students participated, during the school year 2021-2022, in the e-Twinning project *Language Challenges for the European Day of Languages* (<https://twinspace.etwinning.net/191096/home>), with partners from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Turkey, with 14 teachers and 144 students involved.

Students were invited to participate in a language challenge occasioned by the European Day of Languages. The 51 challenges contained within "The Secret Agent's handbook of Language Challenges" (available at <https://edl.ecml.at/>) encouraged learners - future international agents - to go beyond their comfort zone and take advantage of the numerous opportunities available to practise or learn more about a language outside a classroom context. They could choose easy challenges that don't involve much time – such as "count from 1-10 in 3 different languages within one minute" or some that are a bit more demanding "together with a friend, write the words to a rap song in a foreign language". The final task was "What do you dare to do in a foreign language?" (a 30 second video which was posted on the European Day of Languages website and entered an international competition). Thus, students discovered that they actually know more than they think about languages!

The main aim of this project was to draw attention to Europe's rich linguistic and cultural diversity, which has to be encouraged and maintained, but also to extend the range of languages that people learn throughout their lives in order to develop their plurilingual skills and strengthen intercultural understanding. Secondly, the project aimed at making the students involved in its activities aware of the utility of the English language as a tool for international communication. Moreover, the project intended to open up to other cultures from our European neighbours and prove that teenagers share common interests, regardless of their origins. Finally, thanks to this project, students improved their speaking, listening and writing skills, as well as their life skills.

First of all, students were asked to draw a language passport (see an example below), which is a simple but creative tool that enables students to present a clear overview of the

languages in their repertoire. The passport helps students understand how they function as multilingual learners, which helps them increase their language awareness, and also helps teachers raise awareness in students of all languages and language competences. By using the language passport, teachers create a classroom that embraces language diversity, which teaches pupils to respect their classmates from different cultures and backgrounds, therefore contributing to increasing the pupils' emotional wellbeing.



The pedagogical approaches used throughout the project are varied and aimed at successfully reaching the aims of the project. Most of all, students did Project-Based Learning: they got fact-based tasks, problems to solve and they worked in groups. Another approach used during this project is constructivism, meaning that students are active, rather than passive learners, they work in groups, research, investigate, create, and express personal opinions. This kind of learning usually transcends traditional subjects. In addition, students had to do some independent research (for example, they had to listen to five songs in five different languages, make a review) and next include their work in a collaborative magazine. Last but not least, the project is based on integrated learning, meaning that learning brings together content and skills from more than one subject area (they had to count from 1 to 5 in 5 foreign languages, make song reviews, write words in different alphabets, such as Greek, Cyrillic and Latin etc.).

In what follows, I will list some challenges run by the students during the project.

Challenges involving several foreign languages:

- I greeted someone (e.g. say hello etc.) and even said 'I love you' in 5 different languages within 1 minute.
- Go to the European Day of Languages' website and identify 5 languages in the 'Which language is it?' game.
- I wrote a word in 3 languages which use different alphabets (such as Greek, Cyrillic and Latin).
- I identified and wrote down 3 words in my own language that mean very different things in other languages (false friends) and posted them in the forum section.
- I found a polyglot who speaks at least 5 different languages and discovered why he/she speaks so many languages.
- I listened to 5 songs in different languages. Students make a collaborative magazine (by using madmagz) and write a review about these 5 songs.

- I identified 5 words in my own language that are the same as/borrowed from other languages.
- I wrote down my favourite colour/sport/hobby/animal in 3 different languages in the forum thread

Challenges involving one foreign language:

- I learned how to sign 2 words and spell my name in a sign language (international sign language or national sign language)
- I read a comic in a foreign language. By using Flipgrid, students record themselves reading a comic strip in a foreign language.
- I introduced myself in a video using a foreign language (by using Flipgrid).
- ‘What do you dare to do in a foreign language?’ Students will prepare a 30 second video which will be posted on the European Day of Languages website (tools used – Flipgrid)
- I switched the language of my phone or tablet in a foreign language for one day (or longer!)
- I told a joke in a foreign language (and someone laughed)
- I borrowed (and read) a foreign language book from a library
- I read a magazine article in a foreign language and told a friend about it

Next, I would suggest some possible ideas for language challenges which are particularly relevant in the current pandemic context:

- Send virtual hugs / encouraging greetings to the world (in a foreign language you are learning)
- Show how you are cooking your favourite national recipe
- Recommend a movie from your country in a foreign language
- Recreate a country you would like to visit after the crisis is over in your home
- Record and explain your favourite current activity at home in a foreign language
- We can make it together! / We are strong together! - film a supportive message in a foreign language
- Film a one minute workout in your native language

The project brought great benefits to teachers (e.g. meeting teachers from different countries and getting acquainted with their culture and traditions, helping them develop professionally, by exchanging teaching ideas, methods and problems we come across in our profession, improving digital skills, gaining self-confidence in speaking English in front of an international audience or making new friendship bonds that can help us in the realization of our own creative ideas), as well as to students. Besides language learning, students improved motivation, developed their transversal skills and had a lot of fun. They were exposed to different accents, they became more motivated to learn English and eager to cooperate on producing digital activities, since they saw the purpose of it, by practising English in natural situations. What is more, students became more self-confident in speaking in front of new people.

The modern teaching and learning strategies aim at shaping a learner’s profile which meets social needs and youth aspirations modeled by the contemporary culture and by globalization. The need to develop key competences is a major objective of education nowadays. I strongly believe that the eight key competences European Council identifies (Literacy; Multilingualism; Numerical, scientific and engineering skills; Digital and technology-based competences; Learning to learn; Civic competence; Entrepreneurship; Cultural awareness and

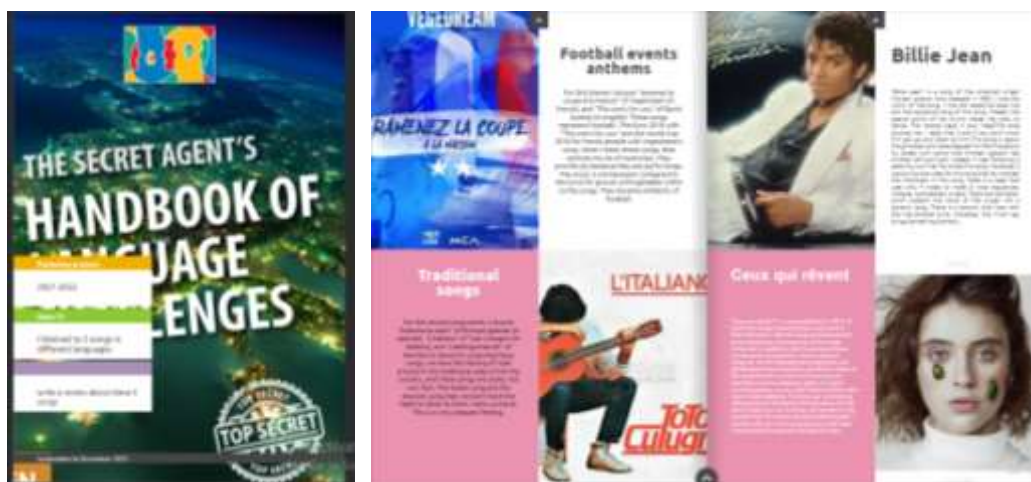
expression), which are needed for personal fulfillment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion to be acquired in school can be practised and acquired naturally through eTwinning projects. Such projects enable students to communicate in a purposeful, natural, not artificial way.

First of all, students improved their *ICT skills*, since they used the internet to prepare PowerPoint presentations, to upload photos or videos and access, evaluate, store, produce, present, exchange information, research in order to do the activities required. What is more, they used social networks to communicate with the members of the project, through forums, e-pads etc. Secondly, they built on their *Learning to learn* competence. It was mainly students who planned and carried out the tasks in the project. Thus, they managed their own learning. They selected and used effective methods and strategies in order to learn, to plan and organize their own learning, they looked for information and process, evaluated and applied the information to learning and everyday life and they found relations between facts and interpreted them. In addition, students analysed the results and drew conclusions. They pondered on their own progress and identified their learning difficulties and planned ways of overcoming the difficulties and of improving their learning. Thirdly, students boosted their *Entrepreneurship* skills. The project means putting ideas into action. This competence includes creativity, innovation, risk taking, developing and managing projects. Acquiring this skill is a great help to subjects in real life, and later on the labour market. Students are thus more eager to seize new opportunities and challenges. Moreover, the students involved in the project improved their *civic competence* and thus have become more active citizens. They found out more about other European cultures and better understood the term European Citizen. It enabled participants to be more actively and democratically involved in the social life, in charities or in volunteering actions. They established relationships for further projects. They learnt to respect and appreciate the culture and the national heritage of their own country and of their partners'. The project made students be more curious, more open-minded, more tolerant and helped them establish new relationships. In addition, thanks to working in a team, students become more aware of ethical and moral values, such as responsibility, cooperation, competition, fair play etc. They show courtesy and respect to the other people. Last but not least, students enhanced their *Communication* skills. The language of the project was English and students used it to communicate, resorting to all the linguistic competences required by the curriculum (listening, speaking, writing and reading). They expressed their opinions, emotions and ideas in both oral and written form, interacting linguistically in an adequate and creative way. Naturally, they improved their linguistic competences while engaged in activities like presenting oneself, asking questions, commenting on texts or videos, interviewing, reacting to others' points of view and expressing opinions.

During the project, students were actively involved and played different roles, which helped them round up their personalities and made the project even more worthwhile.

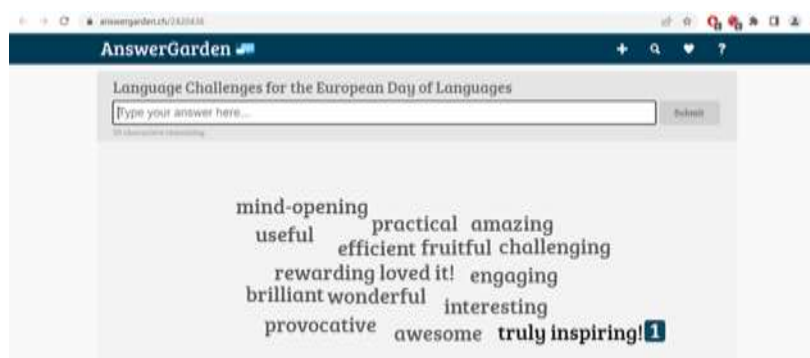
- Students as **collaborators**:

By using the app Madmagz, students made a collaborative magazine. They had to listen to five songs in different languages and write a review about them.
<https://madmagz.com/magazine/1937283>



- Students as **technicians**: They used *Toontastic* and created tools to evaluate the project.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxZmaXJbbPs&t=1s>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTU-1y7t0w8&t=1s&ab_channel=CorinneHoffert
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZIXP-GHJuY&ab_channel=CorinneHoffert
- Students as **advertisers**: In the *Who are we?* section, the students presented their school, as well as their hometown. They also spread the word about activities and interacted with others.
- Students as **learners** in non-formal and informal contexts: Thanks to this e-Twinning project, students developed their speaking, listening and writing skills, as well as their 21st century life skills such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, active citizenship, collaboration, solving problems, improving learning experience (learning to learn). What is more, they enhanced their transversal skills, like the ability to work in a team, collaborate, communication and negotiation skills, analytical skills, creativity, as well as their intercultural and digital skills.
- Students as **decision-makers**: They voted for the logo of the project and expressed opinions in the forum section about the outcomes of the project.
- Students as **evaluators**: They used the feedback tool *AnswerGarden* to offer their evaluation of the project. The students completed some feedback questionnaires and

the results were encouraging: they all loved being a part of the project, were satisfied with all the things they learnt throughout this experience and are looking forward to a new e-Twinning project.



- Students as **change makers**: They implemented actions at school, at home and in the community and improved their academic performances. The project enabled them to understand what exactly a language means, since they had to say something using a sign language. I also used this opportunity to explain that music and mathematics are also languages and we had a discussion about inclusion in school of autistic children or deaf children via these means of communication.

As regards curricular integration, I teach English and French and also have some knowledge of German and Spanish. I have thus tried to integrate foreign languages in my classes (by comparing cultural specific elements, like idioms, for instance, or untranslatable words from various European languages).

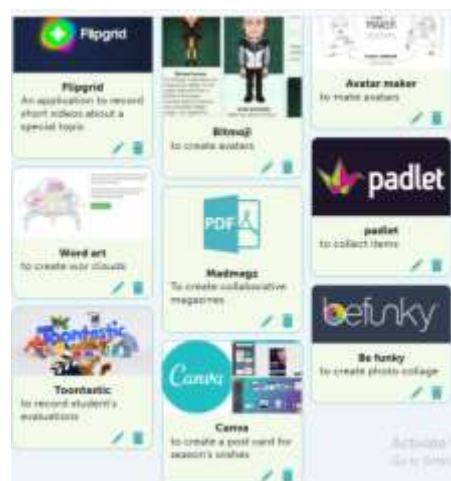


Me and my partners collaborated throughout all the stages of the project. First, we made a Google doc with the distribution of our tasks. We made a short presentation about our towns and schools in order to get to know each other better. We, teachers, also had regular meetings to offer feedback on the progress of our students' work and to suggest improvement. In the end, each of us made an evaluation of the project. There was a permanent collaboration between our students throughout the project, as well. The students completed the *Page discussions section*, answering questions such as: 'According to you, what makes a good song?' or 'Do you prefer reading a book with only words or a comic? Why?'. Another product of our students' team work is the collaborative magazine created with the app Madmagz.

The most hardworking students received a certificate: Agent + Name for being an international (secret) agent.



As to what technology is concerned, it was used, first of all, to ensure proper communication between partners (both teachers and students). We used the following communication tools: Twinspace, Gmail Google Drive, Gmail. Moreover, in order to complete the activities of the project, we used a variety of apps, such as: Flipgrid (to record short videos about a special topic), Madmagz (to create a collaborative magazine), AnswerGarden (to record students' feedback on the project), Toontastic (to evaluate the project), Padlet (to collect items), Zoom (for online meetings), not to mention the e-Twinning platform.



We posted a poster entitled ‘The Rules of Netiquette’, in which the correct code of conduct was established. The students’ parents completed a Google Form in which they expressed their consent regarding their child’s participation in the project, the use of photos or videos to be distributed only on the e-Twinning platform and the publication of some of the work done within the project on specialized academic sites.



At the end of the project, students have highly improved their vocabulary and cultural knowledge regarding foreign languages. From an affective point of view, they have become more aware of Europe’s rich linguistic and cultural diversity, which has to be encouraged and maintained. What is more, the activities suggested helped reinforce students’ intercultural understanding. Last but not least, this project could be the starting point for further collaborations between the different European countries involved in it.

In order to make our project more visible, I disseminated it as part of my evaluation for the course *Embracing Language Diversity in Your Classroom - 2021 Edition*, Brussels, organized by School Education Gateway, Teacher Academy.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/learningdesigner/viewer.php?uri=/personal/alexandram/designs/fid/2816a9d3e84591865d0be81b017fcff70c91a5f49b01a3e4a040e4be65018dfb&v=2.45>

As a token of appreciation, our labour of love was rewarded with the eTwinning Quality Label.



By way of conclusion, I would quote journalist Flora Lewis: *Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things, but learning another way to think about things.* Studying a foreign language helps surpass barriers and creates bonds between human beings on a deeper level of mutual understanding. And thus, attaining this mutual understanding, you will naturally embark on a more interesting and satisfying personal and professional life!