

TEACHER TRAINING IN THE NAVAL ACADEMY – EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICES

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Abstract: *Teachers continue to be important factors in the process of teaching foreign languages and thus, their permanent training is a guaranty for their students' successful performance. The key role played by teachers in creating a quality education system was recognized and as a logical consequence, a program of training has been developed by the Ministry of Defence at its Human Resources Management Directorate level. The program addresses equally new and experienced teachers as we strongly believe that developing professionally is a lifelong learning process. The aim of this paper is to present the development of teacher training in the Naval Academy as a means of providing teachers with knowledge, experience, guidance and a forum where they can share their personal achievements.*

Key-words: *teacher training, online resources, teaching methods, lifelong learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that important steps have been made in the last few years in the field of language training within the Romanian Ministry of Defense. UK-provided self-access centers and US-provided second generation language laboratories were installed. They were supplemented by an extensive range of teaching materials (i.e., dictionaries, handbooks, fiction and no-fiction literature, audio & video materials, etc.). A significant amount of expertise was acquired by teachers during different projects and we can mention here two very successful ones: the Romanian Military English Project (run by UK) and IMET scheme under US coordination. Nevertheless, it was clearly understood that without well-trained teachers in the ESP field (English for specific purposes), the teaching process cannot be completed.

2. STATING THE FACTS

Teacher training has always been of great importance and thus the year 2004 was decisive as then the first teacher training seminars were organized at the ministry level. Teachers teaching in the Romanian military system were invited to participate annually, in an one-week training in one of the training centers in “Carol Davila” National Defense University or “Mircea cel Batran” Naval Academy. Each training center has its own trainers and training programs. It was hoped that trainings will lead to a better mutual understanding between teachers and policy makers, will give teachers more confidence in teaching English for specific purposes, will keep teachers up to date with the latest development in the teaching field and will offer them a platform where they can share their expertise, answer their questions, and not the least, know each other better. Yet, there still remains a lot to do and this is why the training continues.

Below, we have set out some of the most important elements that already can be counted as pluses:

STANAG 6001 is of great importance and teachers need to be familiarized with the language interoperability requirements and criteria. Thus, the first seminar organized in the Naval Academy was: *The implementation of STANAG 6001 requirements into the military English classes* (2004-2006). It was hoped that by the end of the seminar, along with the expertise gained during their professional career to that point, teachers can ‘translate’ into operational items, up to the final product, i.e., L/S/R/W teaching materials and test batteries, some STANAG 6001 requirements. It was considered of great importance for selection purposes, the teacher’s ability to know when a student is at level 1, or 2 or even 3. The seminar started with a brief discussion of what a teaching objective constitutes (i.e., differences between teaching objectives and exercise formats). Teachers were demonstrated how to draw teaching objectives out of the STANAG descriptors. Each skill was tackled in separate training sessions. It started with Reading, types of reading

(i.e., quick and careful reading/scanning and skimming) and continued with planning reading activities having in mind the logical steps of a reading activity: pre-reading, while reading and post reading. Reading exercise formats were also brought into discussion. Attention was given to how to best select and exploit reading texts (i.e., sources). Similarly, the Listening skill was discussed in terms of types of listening (global, local, selective, etc.), planning listening activities (pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening) and selection and exploitation of listening texts. The productive skills – Speaking and Writing – followed the same pattern. During the last day of the seminar, participants presented their projects.

The feedback revealed that all participants appreciated the materials produced during the seminar and the chance to get a bank of teaching materials that they were able to take along and use at their work place during the teaching process. The main aim of the next seminar, *Familiarization with the CEF descriptors* (2007-2008), was to familiarize teachers with the Common European Framework (CEF) policy. The seminar started with a general presentation in which terms were clarified and CEF directions were discussed. Special emphasis was placed on how the four skills should be addressed in class: specific competencies and sample activities were developed for the speaking and writing activities in terms of designing a speaking task, doing the interviews and round-up discussions, while listening and reading skills were tackled having in mind specific competences such as: how to organize a teaching unit or how to address group presentations. Two sessions were devoted to authentic materials and teachers were introduced to both theoretical and practical approaches. Ways of exploiting authentic materials and turning them into teaching materials were discussed. Materials development was the core of the seminar and teachers were given the chance to put into practice all aspects discussed during the whole training.

The feedback questionnaires answered in previous seminars revealed one important aspect, namely the need for more specific topics connected to the military environment. Trainees expressed their need for direct contact with military professionals through briefings and military-related discussions. Thus, the trainers decided to develop a new course, this time having as main objective the NATO terminology. *NATO terminology – materials development and their integration in the teaching process* was the third series of seminars and was run between 2009 and 2011.

The seminar was designed around two main strands: methodology and military terminology seen from a teaching point of view. The main aspect discussed was that teaching methodology is the same regardless of where it is applied. The same teaching methods and approaches can be adopted whether the topic of a lesson

would be about NATO organization, hotel management or business English. As for the military strand, there were two distinct blocks. One was covered by a military instructor

The second one was covered by trainers who prepared teaching sessions which were either task-based and trainees could see not only how lessons can be designed but could play the role of their students and receive the training directly, or there were group discussions or round tables in which trainees and trainers discussed different aspects connected to various teaching aspects. The military briefings were selected in such a way that they would address a large audience not only a specific armed force. Thus, topics such as PSO-ISAF, NATO structure, PfP, Mine awareness or CIMIC were presented. Each briefing was immediately followed by a Recycling military terminology session in which the trainer exploited the terminology from the briefing and designed all the teaching-learning activities starting with this specialized terminology. As the teaching materials – text books, manuals, workbooks, videos, audio materials – available on the market are very scarce, special attention was given to authentic materials and how they can be turned into teaching tools. The Speaking skill, which is considered by students as one of the most difficult to master, was demonstrated in a series of Role Plays (under the form of presentation, production and practice). Webquests were also introduced for the first time in the seminar. The aim of this topic was two folded. Firstly, the trainers wanted to give examples of student-centered activities as a webquest is a series of Internet websites that students have to access in order to solve the tasks set by the teacher. Secondly, trainers wanted to open the road to a new training format which they were planning to offer as a continuation of previous seminars. Similar to previous trainings, the core of the seminar was again materials development. Trainees were given the chance to prepare

who presented military briefings where the terminology was put into context.

their own teaching materials starting from the military briefings they were exposed to and the recycling military terminology sessions offered by the trainers. The feedback questionnaire administered at the end of the seminar demonstrated that the training was very successful and that trainees are very open to new ideas and new approaches.

The success of the sessions devoted to Webquests gave the trainers the idea of developing a seminar on how to teach English with the help of online resources. Starting with 2011, a series of seminars on: *Teaching military English using online resources* have been developed. The aims of the seminar were: to familiarize participants with a variety of available online resources; to expand the participants' skills of exploiting online resources; to facilitate networking and experience sharing among participants and trainers, and the objectives were: to expose the teachers to a variety of online resources; to let teachers experience a series of practical teaching activities based on the presented online resources; to make teachers practice adapting or creating teaching materials based on online resources; to offer participants the chance to team-work in mini-groups in order to create teaching materials geared towards specific objectives and not the least, to evaluate teaching materials, to receive and extend feedback on own work.

At the end of each seminar a feedback questionnaire was applied. Apart from evaluating each practical session, trainees were asked to give their opinion about the structure of the seminar, balance of the theory and practice, materials provided by tutors, achievement of the stated objectives, relevance of the content to their working place, and quality of training.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The one and only purpose of this paper is to highlight an important problem and to generate discussion around the matter of offering the best training to teachers in the military system.

Teachers have gained a good level of expertise. It resulted in two obvious advantages. Firstly, a type of expertise-exchange could be achieved within our 'cadre' of teachers. Secondly, we could design and produce our bank of teaching materials.

The feedback has demonstrated that teacher training is a necessary tool from which everybody benefits. It has been strongly pointed out that it should be continued on a regular basis. It was also admitted that all teachers, regardless of their teaching experience, need to keep up to date with the latest developments in the teaching/learning process and this can be obtained mainly by participation in such activities.

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