POOLS-3, Project Meeting, Barcelona, April 13-16

In attendance:

Gordon Wells, SMO
Kent Andersen, SDE
Charo Cuart, Stucom
Alex Castel, Stucom
Francesc Sanahuja, Stucom
Alberto Milian, Sucom
Caoimhin O Donnail, Ulster
Malachy O’ Neil, Ulster
Neil Comer, Ulster
3 student observers

Apologies:

Dasa Pelikanova, Pelican
Stefan Zabojnik, Pelican

Day One

1. Introductions and Progress Review

Charo welcomed all participants to Stucom. Gordon thanked her on behalf of the POOLS-3 project. In opening remarks it was noted that illness had deprived the meeting of Pelican representation in person, but that all efforts were being made to ensure that there could still be some input from them by Skype or VC later in the week, particularly in relation to feedback from their training sessions.

After round the table personal introductions Gordon summarised the plan for the four-day meeting as set out in the agenda, emphasising the room for flexibility to take account of issues as they arise.

Review of progress:

1. 6-monthly activity reports

The reports from each partner were considered in turn, and discussed. Some additional information was also given.

SMO: predominantly occupied with preparing, compiling, and submitting the Interim Report and dealing with follow-up questions and issues arising. Gordon thanked all partners for their co-operation and input. In addition, a number of training sessions, including to teacher trainees, had been delivered on campus which highlighted some of the same CALL tools that were the focus of POOLS-3.

SDE: a lot of additional dissemination work, including online via Christmas and St Patrick’s Day e-greetings, generating significant feedback from Belgium and Cuba. The EMEU (Engineering Mobility across Europe) project had also shown keen interest in POOLS-3 outputs following a presentation by Kent. Kent had also presented POOLS-3 outputs to another EU mobility project in Bilbao and to CLIL4U. Kent also noted that the POOLS-3 project had enriched the sustainability of the TOOLS project outputs by enabling and supporting continuing development of the CALL tools developed there.

EfVET: the team noted the continued work on dissemination by EfVET (commended in the Interim Report), and recorded their thanks to Valentina for her fantastic efforts in this regard.

Pelican: the team noted the Pelican report. The Ministry of Education accreditation is a notable achievement and sincere congratulations are due to Pelican on this, as well as the Video for All connections and video dissemination work. The team recorded their thanks to Pelican for their continued work on Social Media dissemination in particular, with the regular blog video postings being a notable feature.

Stucom: Charo highlighted co-operative links with other European projects, particularly “Gain Time” (looking at Flip methodologies) and EUapps4us. There is potential for teachers and students to create apps that link to some of the materials created in POOLS-3.

There followed an open discussion on the possibilities and potential to create, use, or link to Clilstore units and YouTube videos on mobile devices. This was felt to be an area worthy of further development and exploration, although beyond the scope and timescale of POOLS-3.

Stucom are also involved in the 16-partnerVisconti project which has the theme of science-related innovation, and in which Stucom hope to contribute insights from POOLS-3.

Ulster: The workshop for Chinese teachers had provided a good “dry run” for delivering the POOLS-3 training sessions for Irish teachers. The printed manual had been found useful, and the exercise had also proved fruitful as a refresher on lesson-planning in general. The A-level day for students and teachers also offered an opportunity to highlight CALL approaches, and shown up a still significant gap in computer-based provision in schools. The contact with Conradh na Gaeilge was important as this is a significant stakeholder in Irish language education and development across the island of Ireland. Caoimhin had also given a talk at the recent pan-Celtic festival in Derry in which CALL featured strongly.

1. External Evaluator Report

The team revisited the External Evaluator’s Report to check progress against the recommendations made therein, and noted that action had been taken in relation to each one. Gordon highlighted the need to record and make good use of evaluative material arising in particular from the training sessions that the importing partners had now started delivering.

1. Interim Report

The team then looked through and discussed the Interim Report Assessment Summary, noting particularly the two main recommendations under Content Assessment. Both of these would be dealt with under separate dedicated agenda items later in the meeting.

1. Project Website

Gordon reminded the meeting that the Interim Report Assessment Summary had highlighted the need for easy access to and navigation around the project website. In open discussion around the table all participants commented on the website’s ease of use, and made suggestions and recommendations on possible developments and improvements. Kent also had some ideas of his own, and responded positively to colleagues’ other suggestions.

It was agreed that the signposting to the site, and within it to project documents and to project teams, should be made clearer. This would necessitate some additional translation work from the Catalan, Czech, and Irish partners. This was readily agreed. The proposed changes could then also be trialled with other users to check for suitability.

Day Two

1. Pilot Courses

Feedback from Delivery. Gordon reminded the full team that the Interim Report Assessment Summary had highlighted the need for comprehensive details on the testing of products and feedback from participants in piloting.

1. Stucom

Charo presented her summary of the evaluation from 16 participants in pilot courses run by Stucom. The responses had been very positive, with strong appreciation expressed for the methodology. The point was made that there was a need for sufficient time to be given to the training to allow all participants to absorb the content. It might be a good idea to produce short introductory videos online to support the learning process.

Overall Stucom had no recommendations for specific changes to the updated outputs. They will run one more training session in July.

1. Ulster

Caoimhìn reported that while Ulster had already put 14 respondents through the pilot training the full evaluation results were not yet compiled, and further sessions were also planned. Again, initial indications were that the responses from participants were overwhelmingly positive. There may be an issue over time and planning, which might require closer examination. Some video feedback had also been recorded, which was viewed in the meeting, and will be made available online.

In more general terms the Ulster team saw additional value in the POOLS project in relation to the project legacy and the relationships established or strengthened in the field of VET and Irish language teaching. There was potential in further exploring how POOLS-3-related products and training could contribute to teachers’ PRSD (Performance Review and Staff Development) processes.

No specific recommendations were made for further adaptation of project outputs.

1. Pelican (via Skype)

Stefan talked through the workshop programme delivered by Pelican and the online evaluation results.

Pelican had so far delivered 3 workshops with 32 participants. Two of the workshops had been delivered on Pelican’s own premises, and the third in a vocational school in Vyskow.

The feedback had been very positive, as reflected in the online survey results. Overall, participants found the featured tools (particularly Clilstore/Multidict/Wordlink, and Hot Potatoes) easy to use and appropriate to the context. Positive video feedback had also been recorded and placed online. This was viewed in the meeting.

Comments were also overwhelmingly positive. One participant had asked for consideration to be given to making the method of uploading exercises to Clilstore more user-friendly. Stefan also reported that significant numbers of more mature teachers in the Czech Republic had still limited experience of using IT, so this kind of work, while ultimately rewarding, could be felt to be more challenging for them than for younger entrants to the profession. Consideration could also be given to other platforms similar to Hot Potatoes – though there might be cost implications with such programs. Pelican will compile a list of these and share them with the group.

Pelican had no recommendations for change to the updated products.

1. Recommendations for changes/updates

Much of this debate had been anticipated in the feedback sessions. It was clear from these that no further changes were recommended at this stage to either the Introduction to CALL or the Course Units Catalogue, the main POOLS-3 products. There is still time and scope to make some amendments on a language-specific basis in the event of any such needs becoming apparent from ongoing piloting with Irish and Catalan.

A useful discussion was nonetheless held with regard to both training delivery format and possible new software developments. The training course manual was felt to provide a very useful framework for structuring the contents, but flexibility of delivery method was felt to be one of the keys to success, particularly as different trainees might require substantially different time allocations in order to successfully complete the course – depending, for example, on their pre-existing levels of experience in teaching, use of IT etc.

Also, on the software development front, consideration could be given to further refinement of the file uploading function in Clilstore (though strictly speaking outside the scope of POOLS-3). Other avenues that could be worth exploring included the use of plug-ins to give the platform a more Moodle-like functionality.

Day Three

1. Financial Matters/Additional Presentation on Clil

Gordon reminded participants that certain matters of financial detail had been raised in the Interim Report Assessment Summary which pertained to individual partners. These were being followed up bilaterally by SMO’s Iain Gordon. No general concerns were expressed in the meeting. This allowed some extra space on the meeting agenda for a presentation by Kent on CLIL developments emanating from the parallel Clil4U project, which was using some of the tools originally developed in previous POOLS/TOOLS projects and further extended in POOLS-3.

Basing his presentation on materials published on the Clil4U website Kent explained the project worked on a clear definition of CLIL that distinguished it from Language for Specific Purposes approaches on the one hand, and from FL-medium education on the other. CLIL depends on co-operation between language and content teachers, in which the concept of language “scaffolding” is key. Kent pointed out that Clilstore could play an important role in the scaffolding process.

The website has lots of material to support both pre-course and main course delivery to teachers. A blended delivery mechanism can therefore be appropriate. Sample videos from Denmark were viewed. There is a wealth of material on the site, including a new Guide to CLIL, available in 6 different languages, including English.

In follow-up discussion various questions were raised with both practical and theoretical application, including in relation to the demands on teacher preparation time, as well as the pros and cons of a functional approach to language teaching in the context of Heritage Language education. Another concern that was expressed related to how text-dependent language scaffolding approaches, including tools like Clilstore to an extent, could be made more effective for students with special needs such as dyslexia. While beyond the remit of POOLS-3, thought could be given to further project work which looked specifically at this question. Support may be available to further explore the feasibility of such a project.

1. Location Filming

In this session the teams explored the practicalities of outdoor filming using an iPad. Gordon demonstrated some simple filming techniques to optimise the sound quality of recording in difficult conditions – for example, in strong winds. Material for two films with a Travel and Tourism theme was recorded in Irish and Catalan, to be edited and uploaded by the Ulster team.

Day Four

1. Final Quarter Planning

The meeting was again joined on Skype by Stefan from Pelican. He was happy to confirm the accuracy of the draft minutes of the first three days in relation to Pelican.

Gordon reminded all importing partners that sample webquests were also to be produced in Catalan, Czech and Irish. Some samples could be found in the Adapt and Translate folder on Dropbox. All partners agreed to prepare own language examples by the end of June.

A Feedback folder had also been created on Dropbox. Pelican agreed to produce a summary similar to the Stucom one, to be placed in that folder. On completion of their round of training workshops Ulster would do the same.

A new folder for Sample Clilstore Units had also been created into which each partner would place their completed examples by the end of June. A representative from each importing partner should be granted Admin rights for Clilstore to enable them to put finishing touches where necessary to units created by trainees during the pilot sessions. Caoimhìn already has these rights for Ulster. Alex was nominated for Stucom, and Stefan for Pelican.

Stefan confirmed that Pelican would continue its active social media dissemination campaign right through to the completion of the project. SDE and Ulster would ensure POOLS-3 representation in the September Eurocall conference, with post-project dissemination also occurring at the EfVET conference. The results of the previous day’s filming could also be used in further online promotion activity by Ulster and Stucom.

Project partners also considered likely further longterm post-project impacts. Pelican’s success in obtaining Ministry of Education accreditation had already been noted. Stucom also will continue to incorporate insights and developments through POOLS-3 in future training delivery within its catchment. Ulster noted that CALL aspects developed through POOLS-3 were now embedded in both years of its Diploma course across three different centres with over 150 participants. The Department of Education’s strategy for Primary languages would receive continuing input from Ulster University as a professional associate in the Curriculum for Examinations and Assessment process (rewardinglearning.co.uk). The island-wide Conradh na Gaeilge link, discussed on Day One, would also be continuing.

Clustering with other projects, such as Island Voices/Guthan nan Eilean, Video for All, and Clil4u, also means that POOLS-3 outputs and processes will live on after the project completion date.

1. Meeting Review

In the final session of the meeting the participants held a brief audio-conference with SMO’s Archie Maclean, who would be taking over Gordon’s role as day-to-day contact for the final section of POOLS-3.

The next and final meeting will be held in Belfast. Participants will travel to the meeting on Monday 7th September and meet on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of that week.

Finally, the participants looked through the Gantt chart and checklist of Results and Milestones to confirm that all actions remained on target. They then completed meeting evaluation forms, and the meeting was concluded, with thanks again to the hosts.