

Minutes of the 13th International CertiLingua Annual Conference

venue: Ministerium der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft Belgiens/ Eupen, Belgium
26 – 27 September 2019

DAY 1

26 September 2019, Eupen

Welcoming Words

Ruth De Sy, head of the pedagogical department of the Ministry of Education of the German-speaking community in Belgium, welcomes the participants of the 13th Annual CertiLingua Conference. She stresses the importance of multilingualism and different cultures in our multinational societies. The German-speaking community is exemplary in this respect and multilingualism clearly implies better opportunities on the labor market or better options of studying abroad. But it most importantly implies that living together in a multinational Europe works better, as well. Multilingualism is not only an economic advantage but also a cultural asset.

The efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Education of the German-speaking community in Belgium to foster multilingualism entail language teacher training, the development of competence tests, and the participation in the CertiLingua label of excellence, which provides transparent documentation of the competences required to establish enriching partnerships. And the Annual Conference, as an example of such a partnership, helps to bring schools and school administrators that share these ideas closer together.

Silke Hinz, chairwoman of the International Steering Group, thanks Ruth De Sy for hosting the conference and Stefanie Palm for its organization.

Before continuing with the agenda Silke Hinz speaks in remembrance of Beatrice Schmitz, whose sudden death earlier this year has really shaken up the CertiLingua community. Her tremendous efforts for the label are pointed out and will be remembered with the greatest esteem.

The commitment for CertiLingua is going to continue in Beatrice's spirit, though, and Silke Hinz thanks the CertiLingua community for the ongoing work put into it.

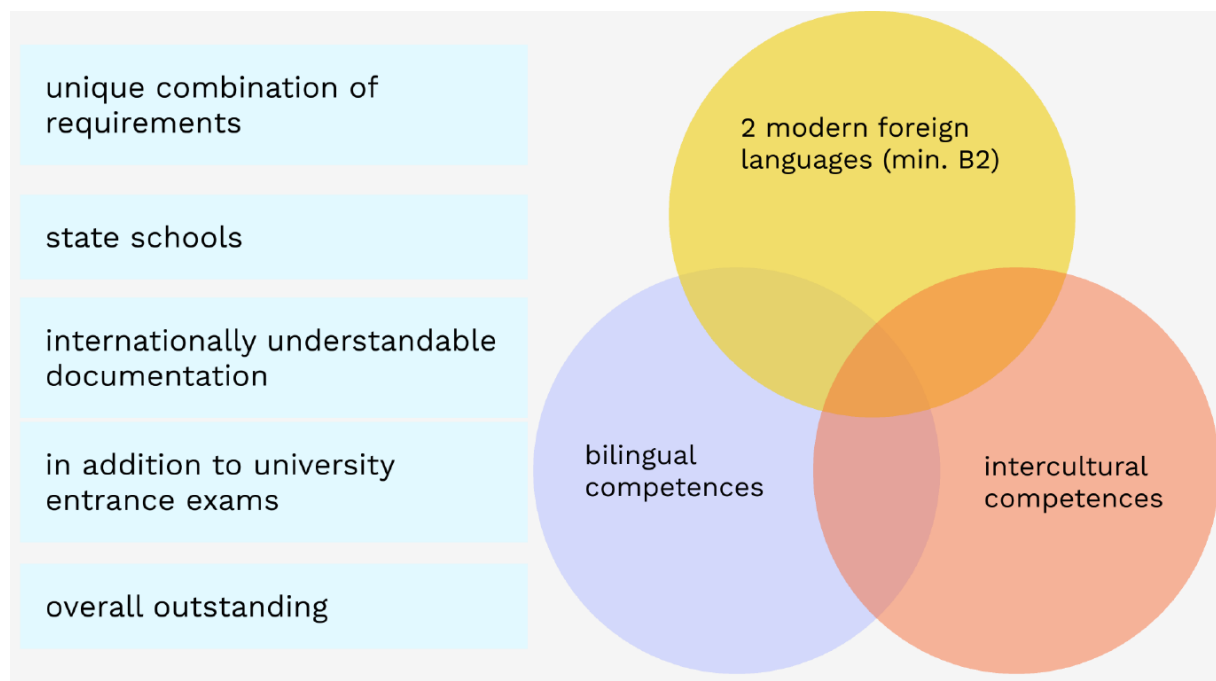
She continues by outlining the latest developments in the label, which is increasingly recognized within Europe and mentioned as an example of good practice in the *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages* by the European Commission.

SHARED CONVICTIONS

The label of excellence rests upon shared convictions and goals that center around

- European integration and cooperation
- multilingualism
- egalitarianism
- excellence in the state school sector
- connecting people of different languages and cultures

CertiLingua provides a transparent documentation of such competences, all acquired at state schools, which are regarded as fundamental in attaining the above-mentioned goals and can be visualized as follows.



NETWORK PRINCIPLES

Operating without a budget or back-office, CertiLingua has been successful for more than a decade by now. This success can also be attributed to certain principles within the network.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------------|
| Unanimous Vote | – | no Member State is left behind |
| Every Contribution Matters | – | Member States contribute what they can |
| Use What Is Already There | – | CertiLingua is based on European Documents |
| Evaluate & Innovate | – | Evaluation and Innovation are vital |

In this respect the need for evaluation as a key principle is stressed, because reliable data is needed to corroborate the label's development and success. All Member States are required by the Memorandum of Understanding to hand in their feedback by December 31st.

It is pointed out that a detailed evaluation will take place in 2020.

The Latest Data

The number of schools reported appears to have declined in 2018, but this is likely due to the fact that in many cases only those schools were included that actually had students who were awarded a CertiLingua certificate rather than all accredited schools.

The number of labels reported also decreased from 839 to 706 in 2018. There are clues that the process of reporting certificates issued was not as reliable as required.

This underlines the importance of reliable and comprehensive yearly feedback.

Feedback is also necessary in order to corroborate the trends that were seen in the label in 2016, such as an enrichment of school programmes, added prestige for schools' language departments, the strengthening of continued language learning and a diversification of bilingual learning opportunities.

INNOVATION

Another aspect the network stands for is its innovative character. While the label itself is innovative with its focus on intercultural competences and its unique combination of requirements that sets it apart from a mere language certificate, new challenges lie ahead and the project documentation with video elements, which is going to be at the center of this year's Annual Conference, epitomizes the network's innovative character once again.

Reports

Austria

Belinda Steinhuber reports from Austria where the label is still continuing with a stable number of schools.

Since CertiLingua implies a certain amount of work, it might be hard to find students eager enough to go the "extra mile". A reduction of lessons in the second foreign language has made it harder to attain the level required.

For students it seems to be increasingly important to know what they gain from a label. In order to increase the label's public recognition, a recognition letter that stresses the importance of multilingualism and intercultural competences has been sent to the chambers of commerce and is to be sent to universities as well.

Belgium (German-speaking community)

Stefanie Palm explains the German-speaking community's main focus is supporting their schools with the documents, the face-to-face-projects and the video documentations. It is seen as a challenge to win more schools for the label in the future.

Czech Republic

Not present

Estonia

Pille Põiklik, from the Estonian ministry of education, reports that Estonia is happy to have increased the number of CertiLingua schools to four.

Having piloted the label in schools that are not necessarily focused on foreign languages, the fourth school is now one that specializes in this field.

A school conference was hosted last year and it is planned to host a training event for teachers this year.

Constant challenges, as in other countries, are the label's recognition, motivation and cuts in the number of lessons in a second foreign language, while English is developing into a really dominant subject at the same time.

France

Clemence Janvre from the Academy of Lille reports from the region. The number of schools and labels is steadily increasing (50 schools, 40 labels awarded).

Policies for upper secondary education are currently changing and CertiLingua has to be integrated into this process.

Germany

Berlin

Christian Seydel points out that the cooperation between participating schools has been supported in Berlin, which was deemed to be very useful. Berlin is also putting a lot of effort into strengthening French as a second foreign language.

Berlin is working on improving the quality of its Project Documentations in terms of a deeper intercultural reflection.

Brandenburg

Not present

Bremen

Representing Bremen, Holger Endich reports that the label is probably facing similar challenges as in many other Member States.

Hamburg

Not present

Hesse

Not present

Lower Saxony

Jens Bolhöfer mentions growth and public recognition as central issues. Due to changes in the educational system, bilingual education might suffer in the future. While one school dropped out, two new ones were certified.

Finding new supporters is seen as an important challenge. Jens Bolhöfer reports about his efforts of making CertiLingua known at companies and universities and suggests gathering materials that underline the importance of the competences that CertiLingua certifies, such as the article Belinda Steinhuber mentioned before.

Mecklenburg Western-Pomerania

Not present

North Rhine-Westphalia

Jan Gerstenberger describes the process of piloting the video documentations in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the first videos were assessed this May.

Another issue that was tackled was the realization of face-to-face projects with schools receiving support in addressing this issue at a conference last year.

Promoting awareness for CertiLingua is a shared challenge that will have to be dealt with more intensively in the future.

Going back to nine years of secondary education in North Rhine-Westphalia this year means a lot of work for schools that might therefore have been less prone to focus on CertiLingua at the same time.

Rhineland Palatinate

The label is working very well in Rhineland Palatinate where it is not possible to obtain a certificate without leaving the country, as Michael Grabis explains.

Efforts are made to combine the label with other developments such as AbiBac. It is intended that, at best, all AbiBac students should also aim for a CertiLingua label.

More and more CertiLingua students are accepted for international internships which are realized on the basis of existing partnership between towns or regions.

Saxony

Rüdiger Möller speaks for Saxony. One focus there is the diversification of the language curricula and forging partnerships with neighboring countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic.

Thuringia

Anka Fehling reports about the six schools in Thuringia, where a steering group has been established for CertiLingua. The central awarding ceremony is used to invite representatives from companies and universities, which has turned out to be very beneficial.

Italy

Gisella Langé points out that the programme has been consolidated in Italy. National and regional networking has been a key factor in this process. CertiLingua has turned out to be a catalyst in the assessment of language skills and intercultural competences within the entire educational landscape. Quality control is taken very seriously and selection criteria are tough. Each CertiLingua school awards about 10 – 15 labels each year, with one school even awarding 80 labels.

While public recognition is also seen as a challenge, school partnerships and the sharing of international practice is regarded as another, and possibly more important, issue that might be also realized more easily.

Italy has also translated the compendium into Italian.

The alignment of the label with new European documents is seen as a necessity to be tackled in order to have CertiLingua recognized on the European stage as well (e. g. *The Recommendation 2030*).

Perm

Not present

Sweden

Not present

WORKSHOPS

The workshop phase is then introduced and begun.
A Q&A workshop is offered on demand.

DAY 2

27 September 2019, EUPEN

The workshops are continued until Kristina Cunningham, Senior expert in the field of multilingualism with the European Commission, has arrived and talks about “Literacy, multilingualism and language awareness – the new comprehensive EU policy” in her key note presentation.

KEY NOTE

In her presentation Kristina Cunningham outlines the language policies of the EU that stress the importance of multilingualism and a rich cultural heritage.

The Barcelona Objective (2002), corroborated in Brussels in 2017, has therefore always been to teach at least two foreign languages from an early age and to achieve high competences in two modern foreign languages in addition to one’s mother tongue.

In this respect, it must be noted, though, that while 97% of all pupils learn English and attain high levels in this language, making it a common basic skill, a second foreign language is not necessarily compulsory at many schools or can usually be dropped after only 3-4 years of learning.

European language policies also focus on how best to include migrants in learning new languages, but also in maintaining their mother tongues, since about 9% of all 15-year olds speak a different language at home than at school. Taking into account learners’ personal linguistic abilities is therefore an important approach to multilingualism.

In addition, tools are promoted that foster innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, using European platforms like eTwinning, EPALE, or the School Education Gateway.

It is also stressed that the budget for EU-funded learning opportunities abroad, such as Erasmus+, has been doubled and the EU is determined “to empower young people, build a European Education Area and to strengthen our European identity.”

Kristina Cunningham points out that CertiLingua is in line with EU objectives on language awareness, innovative inclusive programmes and mobility. She stresses the great potential of

the CertiLingua-Network and recommends cooperating with universities, in particular their linguistic institutes, who might be interested doing research and gathering data on various aspects of CertiLingua.

Note: *Kristina Cunningham's presentation is available as an attachment to this document.*

PRESENTATION OF WORKSHOP RESULTS

The workshop results are presented and all workshops arrive at very similar conclusions that can be summarized as follows:

Intentions:

The intentions to pilot project documentations with video elements were numerous and comprised:

- increasing the attractiveness of the label
- activating more male students
- receiving more public recognition
- decreasing or changing the workload of the applicants
- making central ideas of the label, especially the intercultural competences, better visible

It was hoped to reach these goals, or at least some of them, by allowing students to produce their project documentations in part as a video, the rationale being that no matter how the documentations are produced, the CertiLingua standards had to be fulfilled.

These standards are defined by the network's agreements on the "traditional" documentation and say that the documentation must give proof of an applicant's language proficiency on – at least – level B2/CEFR and that the corresponding standards in the intercultural domain must be met, as defined by the *CertiLingua Standards of Excellence in Intercultural Competences*, the *Guidelines* and the *Checklist for Project Documentations*.

On the basis of examples provided by the Member States, the workshops then discussed the challenges and the chances that such a format entails for the network, its standards and the mechanisms of quality control in the Member States.

Challenges

<i>Practicability</i>	It needs to be discussed how video documentations can be handled by the Member States and whether, for example, a maximum video length should be defined or whether this should be decided by the Member States. Moreover, the question of technical issues (such as sound quality or cinematic techniques) and their impact on the assessment is mentioned as a challenge.
<i>Validity</i>	Talking about assessment, further questions arise, such as the question to what degree creativity can play a role in the assessment of a documentation or how to deal with the fact that individuals other than the applicants might be seen and heard in such a product.
<i>Workload</i>	Currently, all examples that were handed in will have entailed more work than just producing a written documentation. Therefore, the question how the workload for the applicants can be steered adequately needs to be addressed.
<i>Coherence</i>	In some cases, the written part and the video part seemed only loosely coherent and better ways of creating a coherent documentation consisting of two parts (written part and video part) need to be explored.

Chances

<i>Creativity</i>	Students seem to be very familiar with visual texts and seem to become very creative in their production. This can be regarded as a valuable enhancement, notwithstanding the challenge of assessing this aspect properly.
<i>Language</i>	Taking into consideration that a written documentation can very easily be written in one's mother tongue and then translated by very powerful online tools, a video documentation provides more proof of an applicant's real language skills. Even if parts are "only" read or learnt by heart to be presented, this is more than is provided in a written documentation and gives at least additional proof of the applicant's pronunciation. In interview situations, it can also be observed how an applicant responds spontaneously, which is a strong piece of evidence for a student's ability to effectively use his or her language skills.
<i>Impression</i>	The videos watched in the workshops have provided a better impression of the applicants whose enthusiasm, emotions, motivation, authenticity or sensitivity could be seen more clearly than in the written documentations.

Signposts

What was considered a valuable orientation in the workshops were the underlying ideas CertiLingua stands for. The video documentations should mirror the idea of connecting people and cultures and should display an applicant's intercultural competences.

The existing documents therefore provide a solid basis for the assessment of video documentations as well.

Nevertheless, this new format entails so many different options that it seems unlikely that it can be standardized in a fashion similar to the written documentation.

While seeking common ground in this issue the network will undoubtedly have to cope with a certain amount of openness in order to facilitate and foster this new format.

It is therefore recommended to extend the pilot phase for the video documentations in order to develop a better common understanding.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE – RESOLUTIONS

Project Documentations with Video Elements

It is hoped to gain additional experience with and more examples of video documentations from the Member States in order to discuss the issue again at the Annual Conference 2021 and therefore suggested to extend the pilot phase for two more years.

The Annual Conference agrees to extend the pilot phase for this new format until 2021.

The CertiLingua Certificate

Changes on the Certificate were discussed at the last two Annual Conferences. It was suggested to add the description of the CEFR level C1, since quite a few students reach this level in one of their CertiLingua languages without it being explained in the same way as level B2 on the back of the Certificate.

In order to ensure identical certificates throughout Europe, the Certificate may not be altered by the Member States, though, but any changes need to be agreed upon by the Annual Conference.

Since no consensus could be reached in this issue in the last few years, it is suggested to add a brief explanation to the back of the Certificate that level B2 can be surpassed, as indicated on the front, and to provide an updated link to the CEFR as a reference.

The Annual Conference agrees to alter the Certificate by

- a.) adding the following sentence to the back (below the description of level B2):

Holders of this certificate may surpass level B2. Descriptors for all levels can be accessed at the web address in footnote 1.

- b.) updating the corresponding link to an English language version of the global scales of the CEFR on the website of the Council of Europe:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

End of the Annual Conference 2019 and Annual Conference 2020

Silke Hinz closes this year's Annual Conference by acknowledging the continued efforts of all participants and by stressing her commitment to further develop and promote the label.

She thanks Stefanie Palm for the organization of this year's conference and Clemence Janvre for inviting the CertiLingua Network to Strasbourg in September 2020.

Due to the European Parliament's changing schedule, a date still needs to set and will be provided shortly.