

# ECOSTAR: English as the Cornerstone of Sustainable Technology and Research

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS



Holiday greetings to our partners celebrating the Passover holiday this coming week, and to our partners celebrating Easter soon. We wish you all a very good and fruitful spring season.



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## Kick-off Meeting – February 2014 at ORT Braude in Karmiel, Israel

Professor Rosa Azhari, former Vice-President of ORT Braude College of Engineering, welcomed the project participants and stressed the importance and timeliness of the project in addressing English language studies at university level in Israel. Dr. Linda Weinberg, ECOSTAR coordinator, introduced the project



to the audience and expressed her optimism that with such a balanced and expert partnership, the goals of the project would be achievable within 3 years – the project will end in November 2016. The consortium comprises 9 Israeli partners –ORT Braude College of Engineering, the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Tel Aviv University, the Open University of Israel, Sami Shamoon College of Engineering, the Nazareth Academic Institute, the National Institute for Testing and Evaluation, the Inter-University Computing Center and the National Union of Israeli Students. The European partners include the University of Nicosia, Cyprus, the Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland, l'Università degli Studi, L'Aquila, Italy, Maastricht University, the Netherlands, the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca in Romania and the University of Leicester in the UK.

## Israeli-EU Collaboration

ECOSTAR will establish a national framework for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language at Institutes of Higher Education in Israel. The European partners will share their experiences and expertise from adopting the Common European Framework for language learning to the development of the Israeli framework and will collaborate on the creation of model learning packages and materials for implementation of the new Israeli EFL framework.

## Towards Standardizing EFL in Israel

Professor Batia Laufer, of the University of Haifa, established the committee within the Council of Higher Education to investigate the state of English Foreign Language studies in Israeli colleges and universities. At the ECOSTAR kick-off meeting Professor Laufer highlighted the current problems including a total lack of uniformity, and the need to improve students' communicative skills as well as their reading abilities. She expressed hope that the ECOSTAR project would succeed in providing some of the solutions.



## Adopting the CEFR in Europe

Victoria Kalogerou of the University of Nicosia in Cyprus, Ewa Hajdasz of WUELS in Poland and Dr. Barbara Hans-Bianchi of L'Aquila in Italy, shared some of their experiences from the process of adopting the Common European Framework for language learning in their institutions.



According to Victoria, the impact of the CEFR is felt in the shaping of national language policies, and has encouraged greater emphasis on the importance of language learning.

The most positive element of the CEFR is the creation of common reference points which cross national and international borders.



The EU partners will be able to apply their experience to help the ECOSTAR project avoid some of the more painful pitfalls associated with change in the language learning curriculum.

## Getting to Know You ...



In every project, there is a slightly awkward phase when the participants still don't know each other very well. Several of the Israeli and European partners had already worked together on a previous project, and most of the Israeli partners had met during the writing of the proposal. However, to break down the remaining barriers, Victoria Robinson of the University of Leicester employed her social skills to encourage all the partners to mingle and to participate fully in a number of ice-breaking activities. The ensuing atmosphere was very positive, in fact quite raucous at times, so much so that the librarians came over to ask for the noise to be kept down.

## ECOSTAR will be active in the following areas of development and implementation:

1. A national framework for tertiary level EFL studies
2. Model learning packages to achieve the learning aims of the framework
3. Repository for learning resources
4. National framework for English medium instruction
5. Model learning modules for EMI, including a virtual field trip
6. Web site to support project development
7. Portal for learning packages and learning resources

## From the ECOSTAR Team at IDC

The ECOSTAR team at IDC has been meeting on a weekly basis in an effort to brainstorm how to develop the learning packages of Work Package 2. We are considering the types of activities to include as resources which can be used as a model within the new framework. Sonia from Romania has kindly offered to help identify the CEFR levels of existing resources. The main focus of our current discussions is how to utilize technology in helping us achieve our aims, and we have identified three areas: student collaboration within and between institutions, students working individually in class and at home, and integrating multimedia input to course materials. Eli Shmueli from IUCC (Work Package 5 leader) came to one of our meetings at IDC and together we tried to clarify our needs. Miriam has also attended meetings at Tel Aviv University and Open University to discuss the interrelated work packages 1, 2 and 3 with the relevant work package leaders.

The IDC ECOSTAR team pictured from left to right: Monica Broido, Avigail Kirschenbaum-Noy, Leor Cohen, Miriam Symon; (not in the picture: Daniel Portman, Noa Kadman and Judy Rothstein).



## EMI Symposium in Oxford: *Victoria Robinson of the University of Leicester attended a one-day symposium on English Medium Instruction– theory and practice. (WP4)*

I found the EMI symposium held at the University of Oxford incredibly useful, with a diverse programme of interesting speakers all expressing their thoughts and experiences regarding EMI. A few common themes seemed to run through a number of the presentations with the general consensus being that:

- EMI should be there to improve / maintain Learning Outcomes
- EMI is context specific
- EMI must take care of the needs of all stakeholders
- EMI policy should be explicit in learner and teacher choices - Requires substantial preparation and high English proficiency

There were discussions about language of assessment (whilst many thought English, there was also an argument for bilingual exams) and the need for research to run concurrently with implementation. Finally, one of the main challenges appears to be that very few countries have an official policy on EMI and in those that do, the policy rarely reflects the practice.

## From Linda Weinberg on WP1 and WP4

The developments in WP1 are significant for WP4 and identifying the main requirements in establishing a framework for EMI also have considerations for WP1. At this stage, we are trying to identify the main requirements that students must fulfil in order for them to participate in EMI courses. These needs will then be integrated into the learning outcomes of the EFL framework. Our next step is to formulate relevant questions that can be incorporated into the needs analysis surveys to be conducted as part of WP1.

We are conducting research to identify any existing policies regarding the implementation of EMI at tertiary level and so far what has emerged is an uneven picture of localized rather than national initiatives. It seems therefore, that through ECOSTAR we will have the unique opportunity of starting at the ground floor and building a framework that will be suited to the Israeli context. Perhaps our initiative will be suitable for adoption in other contexts later on.

*Dr. Ofra Inbar from Tel Aviv University, and part of the WP1 team, will attend a 3-day EALTA 2014 conference at Warwick University in the UK, at the end of May. There will be many presentations on various aspects concerning the use and adaptation of the CEFR. In addition to making new contacts with people in the field, Ofra will share information and updates with the consortium on her return from the meetings.*

## Reporting from Work Package 1 – Tel Aviv University

**Familiarization with CEFR:** We have been busy familiarizing ourselves with the CEFR, its scales and additional reference material. We have made our own glossary of terms and have put the various scales on a spreadsheet as a starting point - and will add, modify, and delete in order to adapt to our context. We have also collected literature on the CEFR. We are keen on critical approaches to the CEFR and would like to explore how some of these issues could be resolved in our future framework (e.g., addressing plurilingualism in contexts/activities). In addition, we have discussed our theoretical framework, which addresses issues such as the need to have an integrative four-skills approach, internationalization (physical and virtual mobility - exchange programs, telecollaboration), digital literacies and multimodalities, intercultural competences, plurilingualism, etc.

**Needs and Situation Analyses:** In terms of our needs/situation analysis, we have determined our stakeholders (students, content instructors, EAP department heads/instructors, and policy makers and of course our European partners) and the tools we will use (online questionnaire using LimeSurvey - <http://www.limesurvey.org/en/> as well as semi-structured interviews). We are now finalizing the content of our online questionnaires to students and content instructors, and hope to have them ready soon. We will also set up a training session for LimeSurvey through Tel Aviv University.

**Additional Issues:** Issues that have arisen relevant to our work package (and others) include the points below. Although some of these will be incorporated into our questionnaires to our European partners, we'd be interested in hearing your thoughts.

- 1) We are wondering if anyone has or is familiar with scales that focus specifically on mediation, as these seem to be scarce in the original framework. The activity itself (mediation) is still a bit fuzzy to us, so this would be helpful.
- 2) The self-study component seems to be an important element of EAP programs aligned to the CEFR. We are very interested in exploring this option further and hearing from our European partners about self-study components in their contexts - what content / activities are included, the scope and breadth, etc.
- 3) We are interested in hearing about how our European partners assess the levels and progress of their

students - and how long it takes to move from level to level (years / credit hours, etc.).

4) We are considering a differential cut off for our exemption level - e.g. C1 in reading but B1 in writing - as this gap will certainly not close in the near future, especially since many EAP programs at present focus on reading comprehension only, or emphasize it much more than the other skills. We'd be interested in hearing reactions to that.

5) With regard to the four domains (education, occupation, personal, public) - we are thinking of an inverted pyramid approach - i.e., much more emphasis on public and personal in A1, A2 and less as you go up through B and C, while the higher up you go the more emphasis is placed on education and occupation (professional). Again, this will be an innovation as most EAP programs in Israel focus on the domain of education only. However, even at the highest proficiency levels, the public domain is relevant, especially if we are advocating physical and virtual mobility.

**Study Day on CEFR:** On May 8th we will be hosting a Study Day on the CEFR, entitled '**The CEFR as a Method of Evaluating Language Quality**' at Tel Aviv University, organized by the Division of Foreign Languages (Rosalie Sitman and Elana Spector-Cohen) and the School of Education (Elana Shohamy) at Tel Aviv University and the Goeth Institut (Jörg Klinner); and sponsored by TAU, ACROLT - Academic Committee for Research on Language Testing, and the Goethe Institut. We will have speakers from abroad (e.g., Erna Gille, Nick Saville, Michaela Perlmann-Balme, Piet v. Avermaet), as well as local speakers including Elana Shohamy and Bernard Spolsky. Session titles are: *The CEFR - Familiarization and Contextualization*, *Panel: Assessment Experiences in Various Foreign Language Learning Contexts in Israel and Critical Perspectives and Challenges of the CEFR*. In the latter session, Elana, Rosalie and Iair will be speaking on "Localizing the CEFR" and this will be our opportunity to disseminate the ECOSTAR project. Unfortunately, Linda will not be able to be there because of a previous commitment, but will collaborate with us in preparing the talk.

Presented by Elana Spector-Cohen (WP1 leader) and the TAU Team: Lisa Amdur, Monica Broido, Ofra Inbar, Iair Or, Rosalie Sitman

**Project Coordinator:**  
**Dr. Linda Weinberg**  
ORT Braude College of  
Engineering  
Phone 972-4-9901985  
Fax 972-4-9901832  
E-mail: linda@braude.ac.il

**Project Manager**  
**Judith Pressman**  
ORT Braude College of  
Engineering  
Cell: 972-50-7626127  
Email: ecostar@braude.ac.il

Dear ECOSTAR partners,

Thank you to everyone who  
contributed to this first newsletter  
(of many to come!).

Please continue to send in summaries,  
articles, updates or any material  
related to ECOSTAR.

In best support,

Judy