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Summary – The story in short



On Friday the 12th of October started in Vicenza “El cafecito español”, an activity developed in the framework of the Grundtvig Partnership project MENTORS, based on the guidelines created by the Leonardo project “The Language Café”. A Spanish mother language speaker facilitates informal learning sessions with Italian participants willing to maintain and improve their Spanish language skills

Aims/Objectives - Why, Where?

In Vicenza there are some Language Cafes (eg: a pub where on Tuesday evening there are some English mother language speakers available to speak in English with the customers, or a pub where once every 15 days people who have worked as volunteers in international

cooperation projects in Latin America are talking about their past work in Spanish). We have chosen to present as good practice “El cafecito español” because this is the activity that has more to do with the project Metikos. Before starting the activity, the facilitator followed a training course on how to organize and manage a Language Café, on group dynamics and has also acquired basic skills on adult education methodologies. “El cafecito español” has been organized according with the guidelines set by the “The Language Café” project and, although informal training activity, is semi-structured. In fact participants had to fill in an enrolment form and are asked to give feedback at the end of each session. During the first meeting a broad agenda was presented to the participants, in order to allow everyone to know in advance what will be discussed during the sessions and to decide accordingly whether to participate or not, based on the interest for the proposed topic, or to prepare adequately so to take the greatest possible benefit from the activity.

The Project - How, Who, When?

“El cafecito español” was advertised through a newsletter sent to Eurocultura’s members living in the Vicenza area. In two days more than 20 applications were received, but, as the place where the sessions are organized is not so large, only 9 were accepted. “El cafecito español” takes place every Friday from 6.45 to 7.45 p.m. and it will continue until Christmas.

Since so many people wanted to participate but haven’t been able to be included in the group, the facilitator is looking for other Spanish mother tongue speakers willing to start similar activities in other parts of the town or in other villages in the province of Vicenza.

The majority of the participants are women (78%), aged from 26 to 50, with different education, ethnic and working background. 33% are interested in participating to improve their work performance, 44% for personal interest in the Spanish language and culture, 11% for tourism and 11% for family reasons.

Results/Evaluation

All those attending “El cafecito español” express their high appreciation for the activity. Some of them participate also in an English Language Café organized in a pub in Vicenza, but they stated that the way El Cafecito is organized (a small group of people with similar language skills, knowledge in advance of what will be discussed during the session) enables a better learning achievement and greater interaction with both the facilitator and with other participants.

The use of different supporting materials (videos, newspaper articles, crosswords, songs etc) is seen as an innovative way to easily learn a foreign language.

All participants asked to have longer sessions and not to stop at Christmas, as originally decided at the beginning of the activity.

Most part of participants asked if it was possible to organize Language Cafes in other languages too.

All the participants especially mentioned the skills and ability of the facilitator, seen as a key element for the success of the activity.

Sustainability

The participation to El Cafecito was restricted only to members of Eurocultura who have paid the membership fee for 2012. All participants said they were willing to pay an additional fee for the participation to the sessions.

This means that the facilitator may receive compensation for his work and is therefore encouraged to continue and expand these activities.

Lessons Learnt

- There is a great demand for informal language learning.
- The participants are willing to pay a fee to participate in these activities.
- A properly trained facilitator is the key for the success of a Language Café.
- Maybe a pub is not the best place to organize a Language Café: a more cozy and reserved place, where there are no customers not related to the activity is perhaps a more appropriate learning place.
- The use of audiovisual support materials facilitate the learning process and makes sessions more stimulating, interesting and varied in terms of educational inputs.