Heuropa! - Didactic guidelines

I Didactic concept

The didactic guidelines are based on a **survey among parents and teachers** of bilingual children. Current study plans for Polish and Czech weekend schools were taken into account when creating the structure and choosing topics. It showed the need to focus on supporting the language skills especially in following areas:

- Comprehension of longer spoken texts
- Comprehension of certain nouns and noun combinations
- Reading with the correct intonation
- Coherent description of experience and pictures and expressing oneself in longer sentences
- Writing short texts - for example invitations or postcards
- Spelling (especially the problematic groups of consonants)
- Vocabulary - although there may be knowledge of basic vocabulary, expressions for distinguishing, phrases, idioms and phraseology are missing or unknown
- Language structure/grammar - verb phrases, uncertainty of use, mistakes in endings of nouns and adjectives, mistakes in creating and using conjugation, difficulties in using courtesy phrases
- Perception of consonants and vowels/pronunciation - difficulties in pronouncing certain vowels and consonants or their groups

Read how results of survey can be incorporated into current research on multilingualism.

General targets of the learning materials

Heuropas primary objectives:

- To support the ability to talk about everyday and familiar topics
- Expand the vocabulary by offering a large spectrum of phrases and words
- Help to use distinctive language patterns with confidence
- Encourage joy of speaking and using the language

Heuropa offers language exercises and games - structured on the age basis to take into account cognitive, social and emotional development of children between 4 and 13 years of age.

All games can be associated with following **topics**:

- People and countries
- Myself, My family and my friends
- My day, my week, my year
- Health, food and free time
- Nature and environment
- My house, my town and travel
- Media and technology

Every topic (except the final one) appears in all age groups. Games contain only **aspects that are relevant and interesting for each age group**. Language complexity is also corresponding. For example whereas pre-school children learn in the topic on nature and environment to name parts of an animal's body to distinguish domestic and wild animals and to name young animals, older children

deal with animals' way of life or using names of animals in phrases (**spiral method of teaching and learning**).

There is a curriculum for Heuropa! It describes skills, vocabulary and grammar areas, language functions and type of text for each age group that will be learning the language. It also contains ideas for further teaching activities.

Pre-school children

The entry point into the Heuropa world for pre-school children is the Crazy Villa. Animals visit the doctor here, the father hunts for sausages in bed and moles build houses from play cards. That all has to be explored and there are also many themes for riddles and question and answer games for parents. Children are guided through the game by a boy and a girl of their own age.

The objective of the games is to offer as many incentives as possible for topics known to children from everyday life or nursery. Pictures and games offer countless **prompts to speaking**. The talking dictionary encourages **repetition of words and phrases**, **answering questions**, comparing reactions to examples in game.

Functional skills: e.g. pictures description, retelling short stories, repeating sentence patterns, asking about place

Children from 5/6 to 9 years old

The starting point for the language path for children aged 5-9 years old is Underwater City, where both heroes live. Their world and everyday life is the same as children's, although little bit crazy to capture their interest.

Games for children at this age **focus on listening exercises**, **perception of sounds**, **description of pictures and situations**, introduction of the alphabet into the games, for example, connecting words with their first characters, supplementing missing letters or spelling names. Besides language contents, children gain knowledge of the earth, features of nature and landscape or the seasons.

Functional skills, e.g.: to introduce themselves and others, to understand interdicts, orders and rules and to know how to reproduce them, describe objects, animals, friends' features, spelling etc.

Children from 10 years of age

On their journey to Heuropa! land, children are guided by a team of **superheroes**.

- Emotional Hydra with her 9 heads who can always provoke discussion
- Ever ready fireman Rocketman and his son Rocky
- Superfast and super clever Leopard Woman and her daughter Lea
- Supersurfer who does not miss any wave
- Crazy DocExtreme, who is always very confident in giving advice

These idiosyncratic figures give the games character and make it more engaging.

Except listening, games for this age group require and support also **understanding of written text**. Players must **complete simple texts**, e.g. apologetic text message, postcard from holidays or writing

a diary. Many of the quiz games support the development of vocabulary not only areas such as technology, science and environmental protection, and also using phrases in contact with other people.

II Platform and Game Design

Educational games in Heuropa! have no set procedure. All games are accessible for everyone but could be selected based on didactical criteria like topic, taught structures, language functions and the age of targeted groups. This allows a simple and individual approach for children with various language levels and conditions.

Approach to games

After entry into a game, the player chooses the language. The content of web sites and guidance to games will be displayed in the chosen language. Guidance and accompanying texts are available in 8 European languages. This helps to involve parents who do not command the targeted language.

A)

To play without guidance, children can choose their age group and get to 3 introductory pictures - Old Villa, Underwater World and Laboratory. From there they follow their curiosity and choose individual games. It is possible to return to introductory pictures anytime by clicking on the cross to close the game and to choose a new game. Most games offer more variations (explanation below).

B)

There is overview of available games, regardless of age group (individual courses). Teachers and parents can choose from a didactical catalogue to give children a selection of specific games to create an individual course. This can be saved and made accessible to children in a specific group or to a parent's own children.

General gaming concept

Game controls are the same for all games in all age groups. Their function is very comprehensible thanks to graphics as text has been deliberately omitted. All aspects are explained acoustically for all target languages by clicking on the light bulb symbol. **Most games have more levels**, which means more variations of one task. A new level is begun by starting the game again or by clicking on the repeat icon (circle with arrow). To keep an uncomplicated approach to the platform **no registration is required**.

Players receive points for every resolved task. It depends on the difficulty of the game how many points can be scored. **When reaching a certain score (8), the player receives one star and after reaching 7 stars, reward in form of an animation**.

III How to use learning platform Heuropa!

Overview

The use of the platform depends on technical equipment in the classroom. Mostly there is one computer where children can take turns in groups. There is also the potential for a teacher using a projector that allows everyone to participate at the same time. In this case the teacher or pupil can control the program while pupils guide him or her with the next steps and solutions.

Teaching conditions can be variegated using funny situations to challenge pupils, such as the teacher (or another adult) may intentionally choose the wrong answers to lighten the mood among children and also motivate them to correct the adult and give right answers. This atmosphere often helps to involve introverted children who usually find it hard to participate. These children mostly choose individual activities and work with the software.

Children have the possibility to swap from one age category to another and try all games without the age restriction.

There is no need to worry that children will get bored after first trial. There is always new aspect of fun in each game. Many smaller children would prefer the familiarity of the already known.

Another possibility to use the learning platform Heuropa! is to combine it with classical learning methods for example maps of nations or continents. Games can offer new incentives or inductions to

learn the topic. It offers further cognition to take place when combined with classical learning methods.

Preschool age

In this category the main focus is on expanding children's vocabulary. Grammar is being taught as "by-product", children will practice and gain deeper knowledge later.

Games are used as a supplement in the lesson. Children can play alone, but only once the principles have been explained and they have learned to find the opening picture. It is also recommended to explain that the description of each game is hidden under the light bulb in top left corner. Children in this age can only listen to the guidelines so it is appropriate to verify that they understand it. Even analysing the text can teach the children how to understand coherent text and develops vocabulary. Children usually find clicking on pictures natural, but to increase the efficiency of a particular exercise for language skills is essential that children use the platform under the guidance of a teacher. Teachers can rehearse particular words or situations, control and correct answers or pronunciation and create similar questions or situations.

Children can play games in small groups - one child controls the mouse, others actively participate in searching for answers, they repeat together what is newly learned.

Characters which guide children throughout the games become familiar and act to reassure children and build their confidence.

The Heuropa! platform can be similarly used at home. At this age, supervision of an adult is also essential. Sharing of games on the platform can be an excellent opportunity to learn together in case the adult does not speak the particular language. However, in this case it is mostly not possible to verify and correct answers (if not done by the software) or pronunciation. This depends on the adults' level of language skills, which may be compromised if they are not native speakers.

School age 7 years +

From 7 years and upwards the majority of children can read the instructions by themselves in their left corner under the bulb sign. It is better for children to work in smaller groups, with younger children having the teacher's assistance. The teacher may allow the pupils to try all the games for younger children and chooses games designed for older children based on focus of particular lessons. Chosen games can be set as homework to practice vocabulary related to certain area of interest or grammar. To achieve that, teacher can create their own course on the platform based on chosen criteria (which is accessed from the bottom of the main page under "Put together a personalized course for your pupils/children.").

Older pupils can independently choose games depending on different criteria of the curriculum being taught - it supports their independence and the teacher can verify if pupils are aware of discussed schoolwork and whether they can choose correct game linked to it.