

Final Conference of the MLARG Project, Opening Speech of the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Boğaziçi University*

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The Office of the Rector of Boğaziçi University, Members of the Turkish Ministry of National Education, The Turkish National Agency and International Representatives of the MLARG Project, My Colleagues, School Principals, Teachers and Students, I am honored to welcome the participants of the Mobile Learning for Young People in Risk Groups Project of the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci Programme. The present project, coordinated by the Boğaziçi University, Department of Foreign Language Education of the Faculty of Education, is framed within the concept of transfer of innovation. The aim and the outcomes of the project, which will be presented in this final conference, are developing and preparing mobile learning materials in English for students who are in the ninth and tenth grades in the Tourism Vocational High Schools.

I would now like to place what is accomplished through this project on a broader frame regarding its underlying philosophy. The key concepts upon which this project rests are tourism, learning, and international collaborations. Let me now take each of these three concepts and briefly extrapolate on them.

Global mobility has never been as extensive and inclusive as it is in the present, comprising diverse populations, who surpass the limits of local geographies and time. Tourism is one of the instruments of global movement. The individual is no longer bound by the locale in which s/he lives or the time period that defines individual lives. Exposure to and interaction with the past and present in one geographical setting is not only possible but also coexist at a particular moment in the experience of the tourist. Certainly the transcendence of barriers of time and space can be achieved through the use of other traditional or recent means such as printed materials or technological media. However, tourism is the only experience which includes the totality of the person, physically, intellectually, and psychologically. It enables the individual to participate in the historical heritage as well as the recent sociology of another setting or culture, in its natural geographical environment. The transaction of the person and the new setting can take place at the individual and societal levels as well as between the person and the artifacts of the civilization of the other setting. Inclusive of the total individual, and the past, present, and the natural context of the setting, tourism, thus, has the potential to promote understanding between cultures, through firsthand experiences which may curtail ethnocentric biases that are devoid of justification. Turkey, with its

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diverse historical heritage, and present sociology as well as its natural geographical richness is very amenable for such exchanges.

The second concept I would like to emphasize is related to learning. Learning is not limited to formal education, but takes place through the expanse of life from birth to death, defined as life-long learning. Like tourism, mobile learning also breaks traditional barriers that confine it to particular predetermined locations. In principle, mobile learning extends learning to unlimited contexts, contents, and users. It offers opportunities of freedom from the limitations of time and space by integrating learning to the flow of life of the learner, with minimum disruption. The direction that mobile learning is taking us, foreshadows novel epistemologies, structures and institutions related to learning, where universal accessibility may be the guiding principle. This new paradigm of accessibility will, I think, lead to unforeseen, hopeful developments in world civilization.

My third point is related to international collaborations. I understand there are four international collaborators to the project carried out by Boğaziçi University in Turkey, namely, Slovakia which developed E-learning models for vocational English, Turkey which developed the mobile learning materials based on the E-learning models of Slovakia, the Czech Republic which determined the most suitable mobile applications of the learning material developed by Turkey, and Italy which disseminated the project in their country through needs assessment evaluations. I understand that the present project developed mobile learning materials for the cellular phones of students in tourism vocational schools, related to using communicative English in the tourist information offices, hotel check-in counters and restaurants. What an appropriate medium of learning for 15 and 16 year-olds, who spend more of their daily lives with their phones rather than with their family members, and who would rather text interactive messages with ten fingers even in the dark to their friends than to talk to them face-to face. For someone like me who does not use the cell phone, despite my colleagues' incessant suggestions and objections, what better use of a medium in which the recent generation shows unfathomable skills and interest.

Therefore, international collaboration on the present project has not only decided on what to teach, but to whom, through what medium, and why. If globalization should mean more than international exchanges towards the maximization of profit for the economically and thus politically powerful, and is based on the moral frame of human dignity for every individual on the planet, cultural exchanges become the most important instrument in its actualization. This exchange will be carried out through a common language. Although no language is inherently more superior to others, English de facto is the most shared language in the present. The target group of students in this project is the interface between the tourist and the host. Their image is not only personal but also representative of their setting. The effectiveness as well as the psychological tone of their interaction will be the first impressions of the tourist. Therefore, international collaborations like this project, whatever their scope might be, in terms of the philosophy on which they are based, are towards the promotion of cultural exchange, and thus, hopefully, world peace.