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Report on Finnish stakeholders' ELINET seminar in Helsinki on 5.11.2014

Finnish stakeholders' ELINET seminar was held in Helsinki November 5th 2014. This was a one-day seminar free of cost to the participants. The purpose of the seminar was to inform the stakeholders about ELINET, more specifically the aims, timeline and implementation of the project as well as the long term plan for the more permanent European literacy network. Additionally, the purpose was to discuss starting a Finnish literacy network and to plan the organization and activities for it.

All the stakeholders listed in the ELINET stakeholder questionnaire were invited to the seminar since the whole idea of the seminar was based on the fact that there was neither time nor opportunity to contact the stakeholders listed in the questionnaire in early 2014. The Finnish stakeholders in the field of literacy knew nothing of ELINET which is why it was impossible to specify in the questionnaire how the stakeholders would like to take part in the network. Thus, the idea was to inform them but also to invite them to be active participants in the more permanent European Literacy Network.

Finnish partners (JyU, FinRA and Lukukeskus) planned and organized the seminar together but for practical reasons Lukukeskus (Reading Centre) took care of the arrangements. ELINET supported the seminar by giving a grant of 3000 euros for this purpose. Speaker fees were not paid but participants were offered coffee and fruit in the morning and lunch during the day. Additionally, partners' travel and accommodation as well as office work were covered by the grant. Greg Brooks, member of the ELINET management board, was kind enough to travel to Helsinki and give a presentation in the seminar without a fee. His travel expenses were covered by Greg himself and FinRA. His accommodation was covered by Lukukeskus (since ELINET's grant did not cover for this).

Approximately 50 persons registered for the seminar, and they represented the following stakeholders: universities of Jyväskylä, Helsinki and Turku, research institutes, FinRA, the Reading centre, National Board of Education, libraries and school libraries, educational authorities from municipalities, vocational schools, publishers such as WSOY and Sanoma Media Finland publishing the comic magazine Donald Duck, national programme Joy of Reading, National newspapers' association, National Audiovisual Institute, Reading Ambassador for Swedish-speaking schools, programme the Year of the Book, Plain language centre, the Finnish Association of Non-fiction Writers, the Finnish Society on Media Education, Tampere City Adult Education Centre, Celia – a Finnish state-owned special library, Taikalamppu – Aladdin's Lamp, a network of regional Art Centres for Children and young people, Rovio Entertainment Ltd, Pornainen school, Union of Finnish Writers, and Onerva Centre for Learning and Consulting. Unfortunately there were some no-shows; the registrations showed that there was an interest anyway.

The program of the seminar

The program consisted of presentations from invited speakers representing the diverse Finnish organizations doing literacy work – academic research communities, libraries, NGOs, publishers, educational development agencies and so on. Also speakers that were known to have good presentations with clear and strong messages were chosen. Additionally, stakeholders were invited to bring material, e.g. handouts, to inform others of their work. The program was as follows (translated into English):

9.30–10.00 Coffee and fruit

10.00–10.10 Opening: Common goals, joint effort / Director Anu Laitila, Reading Centre

10.10–10.20 Society for Finnish Literature / Secretary general Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen

10.20–10.50 European Literacy Policy Network ELINET / PhD Sari Sulkunen

10.50–11.35 Main literacy challenges in Europe from British perspective / Emeritus Professor of Education Greg Brooks

11.35–11.50 Lukukeskus - Reading Centre / Anu Laitila

11.50–13.00 Lunch and coffee

13.00–13.25 Let's widen the concept of reading / Director of Helsinki library unit Tuula Haavisto

13.25–13.40 The Swedish-speaking reading ambassador presents herself / Mother tongue teacher and author of children's books Katarina von Numers-Ekman

13.40–13.55 Stories are always needed / Publisher Saara Tiuraniemi

13.55–14.10 FinRA in 2020 / Special education teacher PhD Ann-Sofie Selin

14.10–14.40 Towards multiliteracy / Counsellors of education Leena Nissilä and Minna Harmanen, National Board of Education

14.40–15.15 What's next? / Sari Sulkunen ja Anu Laitila

The programme as well as the presentations are uploaded at <http://www.lukukeskus.fi/> and at <http://finnishreadingassociation.blogspot.fi/>

The gains of the seminar

Presentations were apt in informing the audience about the literacy work done by different organizations but also in framing literacy work at the level of the whole society. Discussion was lively after the presentations and during lunch. The seminar offered all the participants plenty of information about ELINET and about the Finnish stakeholders in field of literacy in particular. It became apparent that literacy work is being done by numerous stakeholders all of which could not even be reached by the one-day seminar. Stakeholders also got to know each other and form an informal network of their own.

Seminar offered a good opportunity to explain the purpose of best practice examples in the framework of ELINET's work and to invite stakeholders to send in best practice examples for ELINET as soon as the call is published and distributed among the stakeholders. It was estimated that based on the seminar presentations alone, nearly 20 examples of good practice were introduced. Is ELINET ready for reviewing such a huge amount of best practice examples this implies?

The formal decision about the Finnish literacy network which was on the agenda was postponed although it did seem stakeholders would find it useful and several activities, such as a web site with stakeholder descriptions and expert database, seminars and newsletters, were proposed. The practical arrangements and solutions require, however, some pondering and time to be solved: which organization would host the website and the network, where the sustainable resources for this could be received? At this point, it was decided that the Finnish ELINET partners Reading Centre

and FinRA will include relevant information about the ELINET and Finnish literacy network on their web site and blog, and Reading Centre will start hosting an informal Finnish Literacy Network.

Overall the practical challenges in creating sustainable network seemed to be similar to those of some Finnish literacy projects with limited duration and ELINET. Fancy and expensive web sites and activities, among other things, are created, then the project ends and then what happens? Even the management board member Greg Brooks couldn't tell us how the sustainable ELINET network will continue after the project ends. In all, there seems to be a clear need to coordinate the literacy work on a national level, as well as on a European level to create synergy to the field. Overall, bringing universities and research institutes and other stakeholders close to each other was one of the most important accomplishments of the seminar, as it is in ELINET, too. Both types of stakeholders have expertise the other one doesn't have, and they thus complement each other.

The ELINET country reports were supposed to be presented in the seminar but this was not done for two reasons. Firstly, they are not ready yet, and secondly, it would have needed much more time. However, a seminar like this would be one ideal way to review the country reports by a wide range of national experts. It would require a seminar of its own, or preferably well-organized workshops with pre-reading.

Some concerns relevant for the work of ELINET were introduced during the discussion. The participants raised the issue of reading in the second language which is relevant in all the age groups to be included in the country reports. Unfortunately, there is no large-scale data that would produce reliable and comparable information about this. Maybe there are national dataset that could be used? Another issue raised was the need to contextualize literacy work at the level of the whole society instead of framing it so much as an educational topic.

Main conclusions and experiences of the national seminar:

- Invite representatives and speakers from diverse literacy organizations and stakeholders. Invite speakers who have good presentation skills, and clear and strong messages.
- Key message is to frame literacy as a nation-wide issue and secondarily as a Europe-wide issue.
- A realistic aim was to inform stakeholders about ELINET and their own work to others and to engage them in the work that we should do together. This can be only achieved if people really meet each other.
- So far stakeholders have been contacted by e-mail but an e-newsletter informing stakeholders twice a year about the work of ELINET and the status of the national network will be sent out during 2015. Additionally there will most likely be another national seminar late 2015 or early 2016 (perhaps every year) in order to ensure active participation in the national network.
- All stakeholders do valuable work with literacy, and look at it from their own perspectives. They were interested in engaging with the work of the literacy network but it was too early to tell them how they can participate in ELINET network when the project is finished. Discussions about the national network and its activities will be continued. The obstacles in coordination seemed to be very practical and concerned coordination and resources for the networks and their work.
- A one-day seminar is more manageable than a two-day event but it means that only a limited number of stakeholders could present their work in plenary. A poster session would have been good but the venue didn't allow it in this case. In the next seminar parallel workshops might be a good idea but in the first and rather short seminar a plenary session was deemed to work best.

- The main input should definitely be from the national stakeholders, not ELINET. It would be ideal, however, if ELINET could provide information and guidelines how the more sustainable network will function in the future and how stakeholders could contribute in reviewing the country reports (and when).
- The support from ELINET was generous enough. Since Greg Brooks was willing to come to a low-cost visit, the original idea about a management board member present could be executed. It was a positive message for the national stakeholders to see that an ELINET representative was present. Also questions about ELINET related to the overall aims, vision and coordination of the project could be answered more in depth than from national partners.
- Once ELINET web site opens to the public, seminar like this would be an ideal for publishing it in the national context. Additionally, getting national partners involved in the Literacy Day in 8.9.2015 is a prerequisite for a successful day which is visible all over Europe. This can be easily achieved in a national seminar where people meet, plan and discuss activities together.
- There will be European collaboration only if and when national partners will be engaged in and committed to the network and its activities. Otherwise we can hardly talk about a real European network. The focus of ELINET should urgently shift into planning the network's activities after the 2-year project.