To: All partner schools

From: The coordinating school

Subject: Teaching innovatively (with a focus on ICT) and its impact on the quality of education

Date: 19-22 March, 2012, Mottola, Italy

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to highlight the main items discussed during the implementation of the second meeting of all participants of the aforementioned Comenius project, organized in Mottola, Italy. The report focuses on some of the important elements of the feedback forms submitted by participants from all the countries involved, namely from Romania, Spain, Turkey, Poland, Italy, Sweden and The Czech Republic.

**Efficiency, level of organization and evaluation**

Based on the contents of the 56 feedback forms, it seemed the participants found the meeting to be a highly successful one (as it scored mostly 4 and 5 on the forms, on a given scale of one to five). Similarly, all members were also in agreement concerning the meeting being well organized by the Italian hosts, with 12 people giving it a score of 3, 12 a score of 4 and the majority, that is 30, giving it the maximum score, 5. All 56 of the surveyed participants considered the meeting had met their expectations. The overall mark for the meeting, based on filling out a scale from one to ten on the feedback forms, was 9.16, (with only 2 persons giving it a mark of 7, while the majority ranked it as a 9 or 10 on the feedback forms).

**Strong and weak points of the meeting**

Given the rather large number of feedback forms submitted, the strong and weak points revealed were numerous and diverse, although some very clear convergent points arose. Participants were particularly impressed by the good organization of the meeting, the friendliness of the hosts, and the general easy-going atmosphere, very conducive to improved cooperation and communication. The students seemed to have enjoyed their experience of living with the host families tremendously, giving praise yet again to the helpfulness and patience of the Italian organizers. Honourable mentions were given to the choice of program, especially the trips and the educational visits, while other highlights included the opening ceremony and the general lively, friendly atmosphere which characterized the meeting as a whole.

From the point of view of the workshop activities, many participants expressed significant satisfaction with the teaching activities, the banner competition and exhibition, as well as the live demonstrations of lessons, involving both students and teachers.

Moreover, as was the case of the previous meeting, held in Turkey, most people considered this a great opportunity for genuine cultural exchange and the privilege of discovering the history and traditions of Italy.

On the other hand, participants were almost unanimous in their dissatisfaction with the very tight schedule and the many activities that had to be done. Although most people were very enthusiastic about having achieved so much in such a short time, and were thankful for having been given the choice of such varied activities, they also felt the schedule was quite punishing at times. As a result, not only did many participants, teachers and students alike, experience exhaustion, but some expressed concerns that the fast pace could actually affect the productivity of the meeting in a negative way. In other words, many partners were quite vocal in their plea for a better-paced schedule for future meetings.

Furthermore, it was also pointed out that, although the meeting was well organized, the schedule was not always followed. Consequently, there were occasionally lengthy gaps between activities, which further contributed to the tiredness of the participants on some days. In addition, some participants decried the somewhat unclear and vague instructions which accompanied some of the activities presented. They felt that everyone could have benefitted a great deal more from participating in the workshops had all the partners presenting made sure to do so in a clearer manner. Another weakness of the meeting was, unfortunately, that not all partners fulfilled their assignments to the best of their abilities. However, measures have already been taken to deal with the situation.

 Finally, some criticism was directed towards the insufficient amount of time spent by the teachers with the students, as some participants would have wished for more teachers-students interactions, as well as more interactions between those teaching the same subject.

**Future steps for project development and suggestions for the next meeting**

Numerous useful ideas were put forward in the hope of developing and bettering the project:

* more live demonstrations involving the use of ICT,
* more discussions and cooperation between teachers of the same subject, as well as more inter-disciplinary cooperation,
* increasing the quality of communication between partners, not just between coordinator-partners,
* creating more teaching activities using ICT, as well as educational software for a variety of subjects
* allotting more time for all activities, including a judicious distribution of some free time in between workshops.

Many of the abovementioned ideas tied into the follow up suggestions on how to insure a better future meeting. Some of them targeted the practical aspects, such as ensuring that future meetings operate on a less punishing – if efficient – schedule than the one of the meeting in Italy. Others, however, were centered on the necessity for teachers to create and share more materials, be it lessons plans or videos, and to take part more actively in the project’s website and its dedicated forum. Some of the surveyed participants emphasized the need for attempting to create common activities, especially in the case of teachers of the same subject.

In addition, it was also deemed potentially beneficial to be given the chance as a teacher and as a student to take part in actual classes taught in the host schools, in order to better understand another educational system, and, hopefully, put such knowledge to good use in one’s own system.

 The necessity to adhere more closely to the official schedule was reiterated, echoing the same suggestion voiced in the case of the meeting organized in Turkey. The importance of more live demonstrations of the integration of ICT into teaching was also highlighted.

Last but not least, it was also pointed out that socialization among the partners of the project could be highly beneficial on several levels, and should therefore be kept in mind as a desirable outcome, not just an unintended consequence of several days spent in workshops and educational tours. Once again, the Italian hosts were warmly congratulated for their involvement and friendliness, which, in the opinion of the participants, went a long way in minimizing the effects of the busy schedule.

**New acquisitions & achieving results**

All participants agreed that the meeting had been a very useful learning experience, particularly when it came to discovering new traditions, amazing cultures, fascinating historical backgrounds and different educational systems. Furthermore, members of the project claimed to have benefitted greatly from observing first hand how each of the countries participating uses ICT in the educational process. They also confessed to have been impressed by the possibility of overcoming most if not all inherent cultural differences with the use of technology. Furthermore, some partners declared the experience had been eye-opening in that they became fully convinced, perhaps for the first time, that the future of education lay in teaching with the aid of ICT. To put it differently, the meeting had offered access to new tools of teaching and learning more effectively, as well as highlighting new educational approaches, such as being able to design educational software without specialized programming knowledge. As mentioned before, the exchange and sharing of diverse cultural experiences provided a very pleasant undercurrent to the professional interactions in the workshops, and partners from many countries, such as Italy, Romania, Turkey and Spain, had the opportunity to discover a wealth of shared heritage, from vocabulary to cooking traditions. Consequently, many partners felt that working in such projects definitely contributed to underpinning the common history and past shared by many countries, and, more importantly, create a sense of togetherness and inevitably point out the necessity of a common future. All participants surveyed agreed that the results of the project are already set to be both useful and relevant, taking into account everything that had been accomplished until this stage.

**Criticisms**

Based on the all time low number of critical comments present in the feedback forms, it would seem that this meeting, although by no means fully devoid of minor inconveniences, was a great deal better organized and more productive than the previous one. The Italian organizers deserve most of the credit for this occurrence, as well as the work done by the majority of the partners. However, it is apparent that the flaws present in the previous meeting were a good learning experience. The only issue that plagued a this meeting, as it did the previous one, was that of time and the necessity of having an incredibly busy schedule, in order to accommodate all points on the project’s agenda. It is to be hoped that the future stage of the project, to be held in Sweden, will benefit from a more leisurely pace.

**Conclusions**

Taking everything into account, it would be fair to conclude that this stage of the current Comenius project has been very beneficial to the students, teachers and schools involved. It was particularly useful in showing what work and cooperation can achieve, in a rather short space of time, and in confirming the usefulness of not just the use of ICT, but also of holding inter-disciplinary workshops and finding software solutions that work in several subjects. It was also productive in terms of the concrete items it yielded, most of them results of the work and cooperation of the partners involved in the project.