

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: 18-23 March, 2013, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Bulgaria

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to detail the main items accomplished during the implementation of the penultimate meeting of all participants of the aforementioned Comenius project, organized in Gorna Oryahovitsa, Bulgaria. The report focuses on the most relevant elements of the feedback forms submitted by participants from all the countries involved, namely from Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Turkey, Poland, Italy and Sweden.

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 a total of 4.47 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 Bulgarian hosts, with a total score of 4.39 out of a maximum of 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 8.84.

Strong and weak points of the meeting

In spite of the relatively large number of feedback forms and of, as a result, multitude of strong and weak points, the overwhelming majority praised the meeting for being well organized, and the hosts and organizers for being hospitable and friendly, particularly, but not limited to, the host families. Other identified strong points include the excellent cultural experience, with participants praising, among others, the opening ceremony, the exhibition at Veliko Tarnovo, the visits to the Manastira complex, Arbanasi and Gabrovo, as well as the good quality of the work accomplished, especially the documentaries presented. The forms submitted by students also offered praise for the good organization and pleasant atmosphere of the parties given for them, particularly the one at Lesopark.

On the other hand, participants voiced a mild dissatisfaction with the location of the hotel – which was, in their opinion, too far away from the school. Furthermore, in spite of their appreciation for the cultural activities, some of the people surveyed indicated that there were too many activities to fit in a short space of time, a problem that had plagued previous project meetings. Others found some of the activities less engaging, and considered that, for instance, some of the documentaries presented could have been shorter, while some of the workshops could have benefitted from a more interactive approach. A number of students found the menu of the daily meals somewhat lacking in variety, whereas some participating teachers thought the dinners were occasionally overly long, particularly at the end of a busy working day.

Future steps for project development and suggestions for the next meeting

With this being the penultimate meeting of the project, and most items on the agenda having already been realized, most suggestions were rehashes of previously mentioned – and only partially resolved- project imperfections. Some of these future steps include:

- more active participation from all parties involved, from teachers and students to host families,
- attempting to maintain a quasi-constant structure of the teams for each country, in order to allow for the development of better and longer-lasting relations,
- developing more educational software and games, as well as making sure they are applied in the classroom,
- creating more short films documenting cultural aspects (and not only) from the participating countries
- pre-testing potential participants to the meetings to ensure a basic, minimum level of English skills, in order to facilitate better communication.

Some responders anticipated no problems for the last meeting, to take place in the coordinating country, Romania, and expressed their full confidence in the organizing abilities of the Romanian hosts. Others conveyed a rather contradictory message, suggesting, on the one hand, joint activities for teachers and students, and, on the other hand, separate activities, to ensure that both groups focused well on items created for their level.

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 perhaps some sort of standard placement should be devised, where participants would be encouraged to sit, particularly at more social activities, such as meals, in a diverse group, therefore avoiding involuntarily segregating by country.

New acquisitions & achieving results

As with all other previous project meetings, all participants agreed that this meeting had been no exception in providing a very useful learning experience, particularly when it came to the cultural aspects. A very close second was represented by the discovery of new teaching methods, and new ways of integrating ICT into the everyday activities of the classroom. Some participants were especially inspired by the educational platforms of the Swedish team, as well as the educational software presented by the other countries. Last, but not least, the partners chose to identify and focus on their cultural similarities, which, in some cases, extended to shared customs and important historical figures and events.

Criticisms

As before, critical contributions were at an all-time low, although some were, indeed, provided. One outlined the perceived marginalization of the most important aspect of the project – teaching innovatively with ICT – and speculated that occasionally other activities in the project temporarily took center stage over it. Another suggested yet again organizing separate workshops for teachers and students, in the hope of better engaging the attention and drawing the contributions of students who, at times, seemed less interested in the activities done during the workshops.

Conclusions

Taking everything into account, it would be fair to conclude that most, if not all the goals of the project have been achieved by this stage, with enormous benefits for all involved. It can also be concluded the paramount importance of further disseminating the final products of the project, and of integrating ICT in all our teaching enterprises.