

Self-evaluation of Comenius 1 Projects

Checklist

I Introduction

What is self-evaluation?

Your school has just been selected for support in a Comenius 1 Project. You are probably very eager to kick off the project with your pupils and your colleagues at home and abroad. You have lots of ideas. Self-evaluation, however, may not necessarily figure among them.

Nevertheless, evaluation is an important issue if you want your project to be a success for everyone involved. What do we mean by evaluation? In fact, it's something what we do all the time in everyday life: *planning activities, carrying them out and reflecting on the outcomes*. In the light of experience, we look back at our original plans and consequently we make changes to improve the efficiency and quality of what we are doing.

Self-evaluation is not there to create more work for you. On the contrary it will make your job easier by clarifying where you are as against where you had planned to be. Thus, it will help you to reach the goals of your project.

Why spend time on self-evaluation?

Is it really worth the effort? Here are our comments on some points that have been raised in the past that we hope will help you to understand the importance of self-evaluation.

"We don't have the time to write, we have too much to plan, the project already uses up a lot of energy."

And yet taking time to stop, to back off, to identify difficulties and successes and to think about the implications means saving time in the future. It's answering the question "Now if I had to do the same thing again, what would I repeat, what would I change to make it work better and save time?"

"If other colleagues aren't interested, that's their problem."

There is a risk that teachers committed to a project will neglect their colleagues and that the gap will widen between the innovators and the others, between those who are willing to put a lot of energy into the project and those who think that it's not worth the effort or are not willing to participate. In the long run, the project can suffer because it risks becoming marginalised and the success of those involved is envied. Telling everyone about the project's successes and difficulties is a way of helping to make progress and of giving recognition and encouragement to the students involved.

"Evaluation means putting us in boxes and diminishing the richness of our project."

It is true that it is sometimes hard to find indicators and that it is impossible to quantify new behaviour, changing skills, different attitudes even more so as the project is part of a process and is by its very nature destined to develop under the influence of all those participating in your school as well as abroad. Yet analysing all aspects of the project

benefits everyone and confirms that you are on the right track or helps you to get back on track, if you are losing sight of your objectives.

II How to plan for self-evaluation before you start

A. MULTILATERALITY

A Comenius project is multilateral. This means that you have to work closely with your project partners. It's worth thinking about the practical elements of this in advance.

Communication

- Frequency of communication between partners – how often will you and your pupils need to contact your project partners? Once a month, once a week, once a day?
- Type of communication between partners – will you communicate by telephone, by letter, by fax, by email, by video conferencing? Realistically, will all of the partners have access to new technology? How often will you meet in person?
- Quality of communication between partners – what will you need to talk about regularly? How will you ensure that all partners are fully involved in project decisions? How will you encourage contacts between the pupils?

School Involvement

A Comenius project should involve the whole school and not just one class and one teacher. You should reflect on the following questions:

- How can you involve colleagues within all the schools in the partnership? At what level should these colleagues be involved?
- How will all the pupils in the partner schools be informed of/involved in the development of the project?

Exchange of Ideas

How will you ensure that there is a sharing of information, insights and experiences between all the participants in the project? What concrete steps can be taken to ensure that this takes place?

Content

Is the content of the project genuinely multilateral? In other words, is it something that is really of interest to all partners and on which they can work together?

B. PROJECT CONTENT

Comenius encourages cross-curricular/interdisciplinary approaches. In designing your project you should think about the following:

- The relationship between project content and organisation. For example, a project on democracy which does not involve all of the students or indeed any of them in the planning phase does not show a coherency between planning and content.
- How will you teach using interdisciplinary approaches? What teaching methods best suit the interdisciplinary approach?
- What materials/teaching methods are you going to use or develop in the field you have chosen to work in?
- How will you involve other teachers from relevant subject areas?
- What will be the role of new technology in the development of the content of the project?

C. IMPACT ON WHOLE SCHOOL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

As stated earlier, your Comenius project should have a wider impact than just one class – it should make a difference to the whole school and have an impact on the local community. To achieve this aim, you might consider looking at the following:

- The active support of head teachers and school management is essential to have an impact on the whole school. How will you enlist this support? How can your Comenius project be “sold” to your school management?
- What concrete steps can you take to ensure that all of the staff and students in all participating institutions are aware of the project?
- How will you ensure that the project has “visibility” in all of the participating schools? Wall charts, web sites, information sessions, other innovative ideas?
- How will you ensure that there is an awareness of the project in the local community? Will you make presentations, sell products or otherwise publicise the project?
- How will you ensure that there are contributions to the project from the local community? Will you look for sponsorship from local companies, will you involve parents, local associations, other bodies in the project? What other measures do you intend to take?

D. CONCRETE END RESULTS

At the end of the project, you will need to have some concrete results. At that moment you should be able to identify at least some of the following as concrete outcomes of the project, and give details of what precisely has been achieved:

- New content learned by the participants in the project.
- Improved learning in the relevant subject areas.
- New skills acquired by project participants.
- Concrete products produced by the project.

- A record of the process-related aspects of the project or, in other words, a record of *how* you carried out the project in terms of organisation, communication and content.
- Dissemination of outcomes within the school and to other schools and bodies within the wider community.

You should use the outcomes as a measure of to what extent the project has contributed to the learning experience of those involved and the quality of education on offer in the schools participating.

III. Issues to be considered during the execution of the project

When you have planned your project and considered carefully in advance the issues raised in Part II above, you can get down to work. When you start working you should remember that ongoing evaluation is a key part of your activity. You might consider looking at the following points while you are working on your project:

- To what extent are we following the work plan?
- Which unforeseen obstacles or problems have made us deviate from the plan?
- How well, how easily and how fully have we managed to achieve our goals from a wide range of perspectives?
- How can we improve the implementation of the work plan - now and in the future?
- How shall we ensure equal opportunities for male and female pupils and staff members in all project activities including the management of projects and international mobility?

One practical tip to make sure that self-evaluation is not forgotten or does not get watered down during the project is to build it in your planning as part of the “normal” project activities. You should set aside time for self-evaluation within your school, with your pupils and colleagues and regularly devote time to it when meeting with your partners.

IV. Questions to be considered at the end of the project

Questions for the project team to consider

You should try to answer these questions as honestly as possible, and make a realistic assessment of what you have achieved. Try to involve pupils in the assessment.

- Have the objectives, either explicit or implicit, been evaluated each year? Have the objectives changed during the course of the project? How have you evaluated whether the objectives have been achieved? Has this assessment had any effect on the project?
- Were the activities appropriate to the proposed objectives? Were there any reasons to reconsider them?
- What kind of methodology was used?

- Was new technology used to produce materials and to undertake activities with pupils? What kind of new technology? To what extent was it used? Was it a useful tool?
- How did the partners communicate? Were there any difficulties in communicating between partners? Was new technology used as a means of communication between participating schools? Which schools? To what extent? Were schools without access to new technology at a disadvantage? How was this overcome?
- To what extent have the staff and other school departments been involved in the project? How did this involvement develop?
- Did the students from different participating countries exchange materials, and did it make them feel closer and really involved in the project?
- Were all the activities the same for all the schools? If not, why not?
- Has the project contributed to the improvement of the school? In what way?

Questions which the Commission and the national agencies need to consider in relation to the operation of the programme as a whole

These questions are particularly relevant for us as programme managers. We need to see what issues are causing problems at European level and what steps we can take to resolve them. If we see that an issue is causing problems in a number of participating countries, we can work together to try to solve the problems.

- Was the project organised in the course of a preparatory visit?
- Was the co-ordinator given any time to work on the project by the school management?
- Have the teachers working on the Comenius project had extra time to co-ordinate and carry out their work?
- Were there difficulties for teachers in attending meetings abroad?
- Were the meetings held by participants sufficient to develop the Comenius Project? How often was it necessary to hold meetings? Ideally, how often should these meetings be held?
- What was the main language(s) of communication? Were other languages used? Did language skills pose a problem to communication?
- Were there any problems with the financial resources available to carry out the project?
- Were there any negative aspects to involvement in the project, for example in relation to the pupils, the teachers, the school management, the parents, the project team?

