EQUIPE - Case Studies

Structure of each case study report (see EQUAL Handbook)

1. Rationale or motivation

· National and local contexts : The project has two contexts within national and international development in the field of education. The focus of the project is the training of primary school teachers through a process of exposure to new ICT tools and through a process of self-analysis and assessment in so far as teaching practices are concerned. This is where training on the job and professional development is going in the rest of Europe. This process towards a continuous learning curve was one of the primary elements which inspired the formation of the consortium and the project itself. Within a local context, after a relevant amount of national budget having been spent on the computerisation of schools to extraordinary levels of excellence, the coordinating institution was and is still conscious of the apprehension with which the local teachers in the primary school levels looked at the new classroom environment wherein ICT tools would become the order of the day. These two elements helped the consortium know what was lacking and motivated the partners to work towards a common goal of catering for the gap in teacher training that existed.

· Dynamics that triggered the quality project : The project coordinating institution possesses elements from the commercial and the academic/educational fields. This dual origin and experience was a contributing factor to final structure of the consortium and the operating dynamics within it. The project, in actual fact, has an operations coordinator who made it his job to put together a multidisciplined and multinational group of partners, and there is an academic coordinator to monitor and organise activities relating to content.

· Demand for a 'quality label' : The quality element was high on the agenda in the choice of partners and the kind of product and training that the partners wanted to produce. Producing a good product was not enough for the coordinating institution and the consortium however. The last thing that was desired was the creation of a product that is an end in itself. In view of this desire to maximise benefits, the consortium set out to formalise even the process of research that would be collated in the process of creating the products, the pilot activities that were necessary and information collated during the use of the product itself. The academic coordinator is following her reading for a Ph.D study with the University of Nottingham on the new ICT classroom environment and this gave an added benefit to the project which was not even planned when the project was still on the drawing board.

2. Objectives

· What were the objectives?

It is apt to quote from the designed objectives of the project at pre-application stage for support from MINERVA since doing so would reflect the point of departure of the consortium's design.

"The pedagogical objectives of the project are the following:

To achieve learner autonomy and training in classrooms by means of the design and development of an innovative educational freeware package.

The introduction of a new learning culture mostly based on the principles of learner autonomy and learner training by the means of innovative methodologies through the collaborative design of educational multimedia materials. ……..

To empower the teachers through training to take the utmost advantage of the use of ICT based educational tools for the planning, delivery and assessment of the teaching.

…….

The training programm will show the ease of transferability of the tool especially the creation of project work, which allows the teacher to create project work and to take the class through a collective and inclusive exercise either because the students may be permitted to work in groups of their own choice on topics of interest to them, or a more comprehensive but more restricted plan of action if the teacher thinks it more suitable. ……..

To develop classroom research strategies and a research mentality through the use of ICT and beyond as from the earliest years of schooling.

Since the software will not be tackling specific subjects but will be broad on generic learning skills the process will encourage the students to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to embark on research tasks which should be a lifelong skill useful for coping with new and unforeseen situations, evaluate and assess their own work and, generally, to learn how to learn from their own successes and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future.

To build a Transnational and trans-European cultural awareness in the classroom, by means of the themes of the educational software.

Through an interactive software based project which lasts throughout a scholastic year, the students will be informed about other people's qualities and background as a minimum, and they will also be given the opportunity to understand and be interested in getting to know more about other communities rather than countries. This second objective of the project, used effectively in the classroom will be a positive development in tomorrow's society which will be made up of people who deal with people with reason instead of prejudice."

· How were they monitored?

There were two ways in which the consortium sought to secure that the project never departs from these objectives. One was the specialisation of the partners. The academic partners made it their job to design what goes in the program of activities and what goes into the freeware package with these specific objectives in mind. Another method was the appointment of a third party evaluator which had the following job description :

" that of ensuring that the whole project is orientated solely towards the creation of educational tool and teacher training.

The second important brief given to EPF is that the pedagogical approach in the software is directed towards inclusive education.

The third function of the external evaluator is to monitor the content and organization of the dissemination seminars in the third phase of the project to ensure the effectiveness of the said activities."

· Were they changed?

There was no change in the objectives since the process of development depends on the objectives themselves and because of a certain amount of discipline that the consortium worked upon itself thanks to a linear system of production. It is apt to add at this point that the element of research was an added objective to the

project. It was taken up following the consortium and the Commission's desire to make the project as sustainable after the project's lifetime.

· Were they achieved ?

The project is still ongoing but it is evident that the objectives are being adhered to at all times. Not all objectives have been turned into benefits yet since the project is exactly half way through its 24 month period of activity.

3. Model

· What model was chosen?

The linear production line was chosen and it was implemented through partners of specific specialisations being coordinated in different units with specific job descriptions.

· Why was that particular model chosen?

There were three reasons for the choice of the model. One was the coordinating institution's background in project management in the financial and commercial field. The other two reasons were out of necessity in view of the highly specific specialisation of the different partners and in view of the very character of the project which entailed specialised activities ranging from researching of cultural minorities, to compilation of material for children, production of software and organisation of pilot activities and international conferences.

· What are the strengths and weakness of the model you chose?

The strengths of this model are as strong as the consortium wants to make them. In the case of s.a.i.l. the partners worked efficiently and all partners knew what their specific job description was and what their role was within the team and within their unit. There is an objective strength in that partners coordinate activities and work on their own at the same time rather than working within a working-together-in-a-vague-manner approach. This strength is however only sustained with a special effort on constant information being relayed to partners about the activities of the other units and partners since this helps different activities to take place within the same context.

This organisation has two weaknesses which need constant attention since they could very easily become problems. As referred to in the previous paragraph, different units and different partners can easily lose the context of the project since there is a natural tendency to isolate oneself to one's own activity. In our case, curtailing this activity took a lot of effort from the partners themselves and from the coordinating institution. A second weakness is that different partners tend to be active on the project at different times. This can also demean the feeling of one comprehensive team working together. This can either be curtailed with constant meetings with partners which is too financially taxing on the project in the case of such multi national partnerships, or else with constant internal dissemination within the consortium on what the different partners are working on and even asked for their feedback on quality and character of products when they are on the drawing board.

· Was it a one-off quality project or part of routine practice? This was a one-off quality project for the consortium as a whole but in view of further applications for other projects together shows that it might not remain a first and only joint

activity. On the other hand the exercise of being a catalyst for joint ventures is the philosophy and the background of the coordinating institution.

4. Organisation

· How was the quality project organised?

There were three units with different job description with parallel activities at times and follow development in different phases of the project. There was an Academic Unit which is responsible for the compilation of material, supervision of research activities and content control for the organisation of international conferences and pilot activities. The Production Unit has the responsibility of producing the software which will be used in class, animation and production of printed and audio visual material that formed part of the planned products of the project. There was a third unit for Dissemination which was set up to organise the conferences and pilot activities in schools to test the materials produced and software, collate data and organise activities.

· Who was involved in what different roles?

The names of the different units warranted specific partners to participate in the three specific units. The Academic Unit was made up of the Department of Primary Education within the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta, Haagse Hogeschool and the Teacher's Resource Centre. The Production Unit was made up of Educational Software Products, Hpcom and Audio Visual Centre. The Dissemination Activities are being carried out by the coordinating institution together with Haagse Hogsechool, Galassi Distribuzioni and Audio Visual Centre.

· How much did it cost?

The projected cost of the whole project will be in the region of 245,000€.

5. Results and implementation

· Did the project have a product (eg a report, a gude, a manual, a new strategy)?

There were two main projected outputs of the project :

i. Teacher Training

The teacher training will be divided into three modules, namely;

a. basic training in learner training and learner automony or student-centred classrooms.

The training will be made in three ways, namely that training sessions will be made available to trainee teachers through the intervention of cooperative faculties of education or teacher training institutions in different countries which have already expressed their wish to join in the exercise and secondly through the publication of papers on inclusive education, learner training and learner autonomy on the website of the project and in specific modules of the seminars which will constitute a part of the dissemination exercise in the third phase of the project.

b. training in making full use of the software package be it for the purpose of developing the policies of the first module or for project work in class which may or may not be structured as part of a whole exercise which lasts throughout a whole scolastic year.

c. the third module would concentrate more on the development of the students' social skills in so far as tolerance is concerned especially in regard to social minorities. Inclusive education as a principle will be, generally speaking, limited to inclusion of students with diverse learning needs in the classroom activities, however, when it comes to the use of the software and the dissemination exercises which will be the third phase of the project, the development of such social skills will be dealt with as a secondary but relevant beneficial by product of the use of the software in view of the topics dealt with therein.

ii. creation of a interactive educational package

The interactive educational freeware package will consist primarily of;
a. a software package intended for students between 8 and 12 years of age who would therefore be attending the last year of the primary school.
b. a teacher's manual within the teacher's user area of the freeware package which would include instructions on the use of the software. The teacher's manual would also contain suggestions, lesson plans, implementation of exercises for the classroom and follow-up exercises for the students who would be given the opportunity to experiment on their skills and learning methods at school or at home.
c. downloadable printed photocopiable material which can be used in class to suppliment the contents of the software in so far as building the several projects found in the different modules of the software is concerned.
d. downloadable material on methods of self-analysis of one's own teaching methods and their success in the classroom.
Most of the modules of the educational package will be based on ;
- the cross border cultural, historical, economic and political diversities of European countries and communities.
- data files, video clips, graphs, maps and any other tools which have a didactic or rather encyclopedic kind of information about the various countries and communities around central Europe and about a wider periphery of countries and communities, in our villages and also in the classrooms where children have to interact with others. This is what the teacher will make use of for the development of social skills of the students who learn that others are different because they are what they are, because of historical and economic development and geography. Used for the purpose of data and together with part of the photocopiable material which would accompany such package, the software can have unlimited use in the classroom in so far as acquisiton of knowledge is concerned but which would make social skills still the center of the classroom activity with input of general knowledge being a healthy by-product of the whole activity.
- the dowloadable software and the website of the project will identify useful web links with sites of interest for every project in the package so that the students can develop research practices in the process.

Secondary projected outputs will be the data collated from the research that is being carried out in the process of creating the freeware package and the teacher's activities in the pilot study activities, and a publication incorporating the said data and the papers presented by the keynote speakers in the three international conferences that form part of the project activities.

· How important was the process of conducting the project?

The process was the only vehicle that would have made the project possible not as an end in itself but as a development of projected activities.

· Were there any unexpected results? Were they positive or negative?

Pilot activities did give new insights into what teachers require and desire. One new element was that teachers participating in the project showed an interest in exchanging ideas with other teachers participating in the pilot activities and this was catered for even in the software package wherein teachers using the tool can now post their own experiences for others to read and react to. Another element was the involvement of the parents who helped by allowing their children to go to each other's houses to continue working on the project work after school hours although pupils were not asked to do so.

6. Implementation

· How were the results and/or recommendations of the quality projects implemented: in the short term? In the longer term?

The project is still ongoing and is therefore in its implementation. The consortium introduced a third party evaluator at the suggestion of the Commission and this was a good experience since the evaluator turned into a critical friend rather than a passive critical analyst in a post mortem fashion. The third party evaluator actually contributed while the process was going on.

· Did it bring about significantly improvements?

Pilot activities have been used for information inwards and outwards and this made the involvement of the end user very beneficial for the project since it made the consortium work within a context that is authentic not hypothetical. Materials were tested on their own and this inspired the consortium to adjust its course in the choice of materials. Materials that were considered secondary on the drawing board proved to be very popular in the pilot activities in the classroom, for example, and the consortium was quick in the uptake to change the importance of different materials round in order that pupils were given the option of choosing what they react better to and what helps them learn.

Ideas given by the third party evaluator at this stage were of inestimable value since they were not present for all inter-partner discussions and this gave a different dimension to the project activities.

· Was it cost effective?

The cost effectiveness was not different to what was projected. It did, however, work well because of a constructive relationship which the coordinating institution and the third party evaluator managed to build together, because had it been otherwise, revision of exercises would have been costly and criticism after an activity is over is nothing next to an a priori expression of opinion of planned activities.

7. References or Bibliography