

## Comenius Project: Anti-Xenophobia in the Primary Schools

26<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> May 2014

The Netherlands & Germany



During our visit, we had the opportunity to visit Het Palet School in Opheusden, the Netherlands and Marienbaumer Modell in Xanten, Germany.

At Het Palet School we had meetings where we discussed various topics such as the running of the school, teaching and learning styles adopted by the school, the use of tablets in the classroom, the mediator system during breaks, school uniforms, school budgeting and the curriculum framework. We also had a tour of the school.

The kindergarten teacher explained how the children (a class of 25 students) are taught how to plan their weekly activities and tasks, and they have to carry out these tasks in the scheduled time. In this way, from such an early age, the students learn to be responsible, accountable, how to manage time and how to be independent learners. This task is one of the foundations on which their learning system is built on and is reinforced by teachers in the future years. The kindergarten class teacher had a weekly planner fixed to the wall with the names of the individual students. Every week, a student had to identify two tasks from those available and mark them on the chart. When one of these tasks is completed, the student must mark the task as “Ready” on the chart. In this way,

the teacher will be aware of the progress of the children without the need of asking them. This strategy is aimed towards training the students in independent learning. This was evident when we entered the school for the first time. We were impressed when we saw two 10 year old children building up a power point presentation on their own, to deliver to the visiting teachers.

We also had the opportunity to observe a demo lesson using tablets. The teacher had three different age groups in the classroom. This may sound like an impossible feat, yet much of the work and organization is carried out by the program supplied with the tablets. One particular strategy for controlling such a situation is the “traffic light system”, where a red light means that students of other age groups cannot ask anything to the teacher but had to work entirely on their own. An orange light means that they can ask the one next to them, while a green light allowed the students to refer to the teacher whenever they needed. This programme focusing saved a lot of corrections for the teacher and helped student autonomy in learning.

Parents can access their child’s portfolio from home and check his/her progress. Parents can try the tablets too. One must also point out the general high level of discipline amongst the students.

At one instance, a group of students were carrying out dancing activities on their own in the schools foyer. We were impressed with the high level of discipline that these activities were carried out. The students were having fun, without making loud noise which could disturb the lessons that were being delivered in the surrounding classes.

We also carried out two science and technology activities with the oldest age group in the school. The first activity was a reaction-time testing activity while the second one involved students who worked in groups to design and make a strong paper structure to span a given distance. The students were divided in groups. At first they found it a bit difficult to collaborate together, because they were not used to this method but eventually they managed to accomplish the task. We could also note that the teaching of English as a foreign language is not given due importance. In fact, we could not communicate the technology activity to the students in English, but needed the help of the class teacher to translate in Dutch. One particular teacher said that English is only taught during the last two years of primary schooling. Yet, in the past years, the subject is now being taught from an earlier age.

Break supervision is carried out in a rather different way than ours. Instead of having groups of teachers stationed at different points around the school grounds, they adopt the “Mediator system”. Two children are chosen from the oldest age group to be mediators. These wear a coloured jacket to be distinguished from the others and have their pictures hung next to the entrance so that everyone can be aware of them. Whenever there is a quarrel, the students involved do not refer the incident to the teachers but try to find a solution themselves with the help of the mediators with the help of the following rules:

- Stay calm, cool down
- Talk and listen - What do both of you want?
- The mediator then asks them to propose a solution
- The solution needs to be a win-win solution, a sort of compromise

A curriculum framework is provided by the State Education Division and then every school is allowed to fill up the gaps according to its particular needs and goals to be reached. In this way, policies are not carried out top-down. Schools and the teachers themselves have ownership of the Curricula, are self-providing and independent.

The school we visited in Xanten on the 28th May has a population of 79 students, 1 Head, 5 teachers and 1 student-teacher. During our observations, we noticed that 9 year old students were comfortable using a microscope. Children had the opportunity of self-evaluating their work by means of multi-coloured simple resources.

Worthy of special note was an after-school programme which aided students who had parents working till late.

It was remarked by the Dutch and German teaching staff that children from Sannat school knew a lot about other countries including the Netherlands.

On the same day, an evaluation meeting was held where everyone present attended. The meeting started with a welcome note by the project coordinator Mr Anton Verwey. He thanked all those present for their hard work throughout the year and asked them to share experiences to give feedback. After around thirty minutes of professional dialogue, the group divided itself into two: Mr Verwey and the Heads of Schools remained in the room whilst the remainder attended the presentation prepared by the Gozitan delegation (Qala and Sannat

Primary School). The presentation focused on the activities held by the schools on Gozo (Sannat and Qala), in relation to the Project.

The meeting between Mr Vervev and Heads of School evaluated the progress of the first year of the Comenius Project (2013-2014).

On a side note, people from different countries should ideally be hosted in the same hotel.

More especially, parents must be informed how to access the Comenius Project website.