



School undergoing Change

In 2008 a new COMENIUS project was set up which aims particularly at further training of teachers of foreign languages, in particular of teachers of German as a foreign language. The project, which is being funded with support from the European Commission, uses a blended learning format for the training activities. This means that the learning activities can be done in a flexible manner: individual and cooperative exercises can be completed by online learning, by face-to-face activities, or a combination of the two. Participating teachers do not even have to leave their home in order to take part in and to benefit from this training if they choose to select online activities only.

The background for this project is the realisation that in an ever changing world the role and function of schools and teachers also have to change rapidly if they want to keep abreast of social developments in their country and across borders in a European context. Nowadays, social changes are placing new demands on teachers. Being a teacher means more than simply 'teaching' students; it requires a broad range of skills, abilities and knowledge that often do not receive enough attention in degree courses and in teacher training. It is exactly in this area that the project sees the need for offering effective, integrated further training to teachers. This applies especially to the professional development for teachers of foreign languages.

Social changes have profound effects not only on theoretical and pedagogical aspects of teaching such as the development of curricula, teaching/learning methodologies, co-operative efforts like team teaching and project learning or the actual delivery of teaching a particular subject in a specific setting but also on the architecture and layout of school

buildings. In these respects, there are new developments emanating from European countries which frequently go unnoticed by their neighbours. Therefore one of the objectives of this COMENIUS project is to increase awareness of innovative and important teaching approaches so as to improve the quality of teaching of foreign languages in Europe. It is also the intention of the project to provide a European reference model for professional development of teachers of foreign languages. In particular, the blended learning modules offered by this project highlight an innovative route to training teachers effectively and in a skill-orientated manner.

This will be done in a teacher-centred way in that the practice of teaching foreign languages will be focused upon in the form of short films (of 2-18 minutes duration) showing present tendencies and developments in the institution school. In particular they provide insights into the complex developments of school activities and teaching and they show how traditional forms of communicating knowledge are being replaced with new learning methods and teaching concepts. These films were made at 10 different schools throughout Germany, and they are based around three content areas, namely *Schools, Teaching and Educational Concepts and Projects*. They provide the hands-on stimulus for discussing concrete concepts and situations, as seen in the films, and to transfer them to and compare them with one's own teaching context in order to improve one's own teaching; this aspect is of central relevance to the project. The blended learning concept guarantees that every voice will be taken into consideration, and the films made in Germany just serve as a stimulus and not an example of how things should be done.

In order to complement, and possibly counterbalance the films from Germany, our partners in Portugal, Finland, Poland and the Czech Republic will also provide film examples on selected school projects and innovative teaching approaches from their respective countries which will serve as additional stimuli in the blended learning program. These films will be available in PDF format in various languages, including English, from the project's website (see below).

The content of the films, which form the core of the project, will be expanded upon by exercises and questions in a variety of interactive formats. These exercises range from

simple content and value questions to complex questions as to the potential criticism and improvement of the sequences from the lessons analysed. Reference will be made to present methodologies, theories and opinions so that the teacher as learner in this project will not only be aware of recent developments but he or she will also be in a position to develop a strong personal voice with regard to these overarching theoretical considerations. In completing these exercises online, the learner is not alone and isolated at his or her PC. Many exercises require group work and discussion groups (all online) so that the learner never feels lost. Furthermore, an online tutor will constantly provide feedback to the individual and to the groups in order to stimulate, co-ordinate and develop responses.

The COMENIUS project was constituted in October 2008 and its developmental stage will conclude in September 2010. However, this does not mean that the project will cease after that; on the contrary, from 2008-2010 the project is being developed in detail and every module is being tested in most of the participating countries (Germany, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and Ireland). Only after successful testing will the project go online for the wider public in October 2010. It will be available for recognised further training for teachers of foreign languages in modular form. The modules on offer are centred on three topic areas:

1. Development of School

- a. Profiles of Schools
- b. Changing School
- c. New Tasks for Teachers
- d. Visions of School

2. Teaching

- a. Start into the Foreign Language
- b. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in the Foreign Language
- c. Project Work in Advanced Classes
- d. Learning by Teaching

3. Educational Concepts Projects

- a. Becoming Autonomous Step by Step

- b. Facilitation of Multilingualism
- c. Pupils take over Responsibilities
- d. Opening of School to the Outside World

Each letter (a, b, c etc.) stands for a module which can be completed online. There is no need to complete all modules or to tackle them in the order listed above; teachers or trainers can select and combine modules according to their interests and their professional needs. Although some exercises of the blended learning course may be completed in English, a good knowledge of German is needed to complete the course.

To summarise, the main objectives of the 'Schule im Wandel' project are:

- Offering an innovative model course for the professional development of foreign language teachers;
- Encouraging cooperative ways of teaching/learning and media skills by using a variety of tools and formats;
- Stimulating a European dialogue on effective professional development for foreign language teachers;
- Fuelling the discussion on school-related concepts and projects throughout Europe.

Further information on this project, including film samples, information about the schools, option of registering for the newsletter, events calendar etc. is available in German at www.goethe.de/schule-im-wandel

Alternatively, the information is provided in English at <http://www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/siw/enindex.htm>

*For any further queries please contact
Dr Arnd Witte, Department of German, National University of Ireland Maynooth,
Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland. Email: a.witte@nuim.ie*