

# Schule im Wandel

Arnd Witte

National University of Ireland, Maynooth

In 2008 a new COMENIUS project entitled 'Schule im Wandel' 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 can be done in a flexible manner: individual and cooperative exercises can be completed by online learning, by face-to-face activities, or by 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 select online activities only. The countries involved in this project are Germany, Finland, the Czech Republic, Poland, Portugal and Ireland.

The background to this project is the realisation that in an ever changing world the role of schools and teachers also has 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 seeks to respond to the need for effective, integrated further training to teachers. This applies especially to professional development for teachers of foreign languages.

One of the objectives of this COMENIUS project is to increase awareness of innovative 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 means of training teachers effectively and in a skill-orientated manner.

This will be done in a teacher-centred way by focusing on the practice of teaching foreign languages in the form of short films of two to 18 minutes duration showing present tendencies and developments in schools. In particular they

provide insights into the complex development of school activities and teaching and 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: Schools; Teaching and Educational Concepts; and Projects. They provide hands-on stimulus for discussing concrete concepts and situations, as seen in the films, and for transferring them to the teaching context of the viewer and comparing them with it in order to improve his or her 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 serve only as a stimulus and not as a model of how things should be done. In order to complement and possibly to 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 programme. These films will be available in PDF format in various languages, including English, from the project website (see below).

This COMENIUS project is presently in its developmental stage and will conclude in September 2010. However, this does not mean that the project will cease after that; on the contrary, between 2008 and 2010 the project is being developed in detail and every module is being tested in most of the participating countries. Only after successful testing will the project go online for the wider public in October 2010. It will be available in modular form for recognised further training for teachers of foreign languages.

Further information on this project, including film samples, information about the schools, the option of registering for the newsletter, events calendar etc, is available in German at [www.goethe.de/schule-im-wandel](http://www.goethe.de/schule-im-wandel). Alternatively, the information is provided in English at [www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/siw/enindex.htm](http://www.goethe.de/lhr/prj/siw/enindex.htm)

Address for correspondence:  
A.Witte@nuim.ie