Second medium-term programme of activities 2004-2007

Project B4 – GULLIVER

To get to know each other leads to better mutual understanding

Central workshop report 2/2004 (short version)

(Graz, Austria, 16-19 June 2004)

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Why the Gulliver Project?

The Gulliver Project was launched by the strong conviction that a united Europe cannot be achieved unless its citizens know and understand one another better. Social cohesion necessarily implies interaction and exchange. Consequently the Project resulted from the determination to give pupils from all over Europe the opportunity to exchange their experiences, their joys and their fears, their dreams and their hopes. Today's pupils cannot foresee the country in which they will eventually live and work nor the languages and cultures with which they will be confronted. They must therefore be made to feel more and more like "citizens of Europe", open to linguistic and cultural diversity. They must be taught the knowledge and skills that will enable them to live and work in a multilingual and multicultural society. An intellectual approach is not enough. Pupils need to travel to lend perspective to their point of view, to learn to accept differences and to get to know one another better. To get to know one another better in order to combat prejudice and stereotypes, to fight against intolerance and xenophobia, and to abolish all barriers. To get to know one another better so they can understand one another better.

In the 21st century these Gulliver's Travels across countries, cultures and languages can be undertaken without leaving the classroom, with the help of the Internet. The PC is to be our mode of transport in this intercultural universe. This vehicle, unlike any other, will enable us to travel through many countries, languages and cultures at the same time. With the aid of computer-based school interaction the language that pupils are learning immediately becomes a tool that allows them to discover the cultural wealth of other countries and thus become more aware of their own cultural identity. We propose setting up a network of language classes and to invite the pupils of these classes, together with their teachers, to take part in an interactive exchange via the Internet on topics put forward by the pupils themselves, topics of genuine interest to them.

Implementing the project: the Graz Workshop

The central workshop was held in Graz, 16-19 June 2004, with representatives of 28 member countries (Appendix 1) of the European Centre for Modern Languages (teachers, teacher trainers, textbook authors), with the following objectives (Appendix 2):

▪ to discuss the teaching/learning of intercultural competence in the various European countries and the tools that teachers and learners need most in order to teach/learn this competence;

▪ to draw up the definitive list of language classes to be involved in the project and the list of subjects to be offered to young schoolchildren for discussion on the forum;

▪ to reach decisions on the way in which the forum is to operate, the way in which the subjects are to be structured on the forum, and the class work schedule during the first phase of the project, through the 2004/2005 school year.

Each participant had been asked beforehand to select between one and three secondary level language classes (French, English, German or Spanish) at his/her school or at another school located in his/her town whose pupils were prepared to contribute to the project. They invited

the pupils to suggest topics they would like to exchange later on with young people from other European countries.

In Graz each participant presented the work done with their class prior to the workshop. They all said that their pupils had been very enthusiastic about the idea of having contact with adolescents living in other European countries. Some of the teachers brought along photos of their class, their school and/or their town.

The awareness of the different levels of the pupils concerned gave rise to a discussion among the participants of what constitutes an awareness of the intercultural in different countries.

It would seem that not many textbooks address this issue, and that teacher training courses often do not take it into account.

The class work done previously by the workshop participants shows that not everyone is necessarily of the same opinion, a fact reflected in the variety of topics put forward.

Many of the participants were worried that if one is not careful, one might be replacing certain stereotypes by others.

It is also crucial to avoid suggesting discussions which are addressed by school textbooks as part of the curriculum. Whether or not there is a potential link between the Gulliver Project and the curricula of the various schools was a question raised on a number of occasions.

Another fear was that intercultural aspects might be reduced to finding a sort of common denominator with which no-one could genuinely identify. Might the intercultural not obscure the cultural?

Finally one last question was raised: Does a class actually reflect a culture? If so, one might believe that a country's inhabitants all share the same points of view, values, hopes, fears, etc., and thus once again be confronted with generalisations, something which the Gulliver Project is precisely seeking to avoid. Just as each society is comprised of several societies, each class is comprised of individuals; that is the wealth and diversity we need to address.

Work on the subjects was carried out based on the topics suggested by the pupils of the countries represented by the participants at the Graz workshop. It was agreed that the choice of topic should meet a number of criteria, specifically:

- It should be neither too encyclopaedic nor too generalised;
- It should be neither too difficult nor too abstract given the pupils' age and language level;
- It should be pertinent so that it genuinely stimulates the interest of young pupils;
- It should enable the young people to express not just what they know but also what they feel, what they think and what they dream of;
- It should enable the pupils to say what they want to say about themselves and to find out what they want to know about others;
- It should be different from the topics traditionally addressed in school textbooks.

A list of topics was finally drawn up at the close of the discussions. It comprises five subjects based around three main themes: where have we come from (yesterday), where are we now (today) and where are we headed (tomorrow)? (Appendix 3)

While working on these subjects the participants wanted to take account of the fact that the aim of the pupils' work on the forum was not just *to write* their own contributions but also *to read* and *to respond* to the contributions of the others in order to create genuine *interaction.*

A day was then set aside to organising the Gulliver forum and a work schedule (Appendix 4) for the classes on the forum (Appendix 5) throughout the 2004/2005 school year.

Development and prospects

The forum is to be organised according to the main themes and the topics – and not according to the different languages. Each pupil who visits the forum will be able to read the contributions made by the others in all the languages of which he or she has some knowledge – even if it is very partial or limited; in this way each language the pupil is learning becomes a tool that enables him to understand better, to learn more, to satisfy eagerness to find out more about others, and to get others to find out more about him or her.

In its first phase the Gulliver forum will be open to a limited network of participants, and will operate according to the strict schedule drawn up by the members of the Gulliver network (Appendix 5) who will work on the forum with their classes. Given the keen interest for this type of work we observed among the workshop participants and their pupils, we anticipate a cascaded development of subsequent contacts and twinnings between two or more schools in the network; we also expect the exchanges to extend into the **second phase**, during which the forum will be open to all pupils and allow free access to discussion. When school resumes and after registration, all the classes will introduce themselves on the forum by also featuring their school's web site where everyone else will be able to browse the documents not included on the forum.

A number of questions were raised on several occasions concerning the forum's *technical possibilities*: Will it be possible to incorporate audio documents, photos, PowerPoint slides? The participants suggested for instance including a map of Europe on the home page with the names of 30 towns in the various countries which would act as links to the presentations of the classes involved in the project and working in those towns.

It is also important to think about the *way in which the teacher is to work with their pupils*. We need to decide whether or not the teacher should correct his/her pupils' contributions. Insofar as only the teachers have the access code enabling them to post the contribution online on the forum, it is crucial to consider their role in their mission as a "link" between their own pupils and the pupils of the other classes.

Given the enthusiasm shown by the first pupils to be sounded out and by the teachers in charge of them, there are hopes that the Gulliver Project will achieve its objectives by becoming a genuine platform of exchange between the young people of different countries in a Europe both multicultural and united.