

Sustaining Development in Early School Education

Report on Local Teacher Training Workshop in Bulgaria

1. Overview

The local teacher training workshop (D7) for Bulgaria was organized by Center for Creative Training Association (CCTA) in Sevlievo, Bulgaria on 5th to 7th April, 2012. The location of the venue was chosen for several reasons, among which is the long-lasting partnership between CCTA and The Educational Department of the Municipality of Sevlievo and the concentration of motivated and active teachers and educators, especially in the pre-school education. Furthermore, Sevlievo is in the central part of the country which makes it convenient meeting point for participants in the training from different part of the country.

An information campaign was held in February and March 2012 to inform teachers and schools from CCTA institutional network about the SUSTAIN project and the forthcoming teacher training. In accordance with the application, the initial plan was to invite for the training also a foreign lecturer from the Educational Center “Danilo Dolci”, but since the dates discussed were not convenient either for the one or for the other partner, a new plan was made – to divide the training in 2 parts: a training with local lecturers and a workshop with Italian lecturer at later stage.

Because of the information campaign and the location of the venue, the training was attended by **36 pre-primary and primary teachers** from the central Bulgaria: Sevlievo, Gabrovo, Lovech, Troyan, Zlatica; from Sofia and Sofia region (Pancharevo, Vakarel, Ihtiman, Samokov), as well as from Aytos (a town situated at the Black sea coast).

Information about the workshop was also sent to the Regional Inspectorate of Education in Sofia. The invitation package consisted of:

- short description of the project and its current and future activities;
- information about the workshop itself: main topics of the training, profile of the participants; date and location; provisional agenda
- registration form with a section for short motivation where candidates for the training had to explain why they want to take part in it.

2. Agenda of the training

The first day of the three-day workshop was dedicate to ice-breaking activities for the participants, focusing on better understanding, teamwork and socializing with peers. The activity was lead by Igljika Angelova – educational expert from Center for Creative Training Association. The project coordinator Reni Dimova presented in detail the project and its aims and objectives, as well as the key competencies for LLL from the European framework. A

short input to the topic of the key competences' development from the practical point of view of the school curriculum was made by Iglïka Angelova.

The work on the second day started with a short session of physical exercises which gave a good start of the day and of the opening discussion on the benefits of the physical activity at school and the advantages of the body exercises for refreshment and better focus.

A short welcoming speech to the participants of the training was made by Sabie Hodzheva, head of Education and Culture department in the Municipality of Sevlievo. The training continued with activity on the topic of long-term impact and sustainable development in the education. It was followed by a presentation and discussion on the incorporation of *inquiry based activities* in the education since its early stages. The reason for including this topic in the agenda is because *inquiry based activities* are supporting in the best way development of the key competences and match very well the SD problematic.

This further flowed into a discussion and sharing of personal experience of the trainees in *teaching natural sciences' topics* in primary and pre-primary education. During the discussion the participants shared both successful strategies from their practice and some problems and issues they have meet in the educational process. The findings were put down and used as starting point for the next stages of the training.

The afternoon session of the second day was devoted mainly to a group activity, which illustrates how a teacher can mix indoor and outdoor activities to get the best results. The used methods included *lead-in conversation* and *task assignment*, combined with *outdoor walk*, *observation*, *description*, *mind-maps* and a *wrap up discussion*. Trainees worked in groups leaded by Iglïka Angelova and Iva Ninova. With this activity was illustrated how elements of the everyday life of the students help the introduction of more complicated topics; a walk around the city center can grow into a lesson about local history, local/ regional plants and flora, weather conditions, etc.

The agenda of the day was closed with a video-conference session with Duygu Yaman, representative from Doga Schools in Istanbul. The session opened with presentation of the school network and focused in detail on the educational methods used in Doga – such as Natural learning concept, practical experience in work with plants and animals, etc. The participants in the workshop engaged in a questions and answer session which provoked discussion on the educational system concerning the natural sciences teaching in Bulgaria and Turkey. The video-conference session was also a practical demonstration on video-conference method which was further explained on the next day of the training.

The morning session on the third day of the workshop was devoted to short presentation of the video-conference method and its implementation in the classroom, the use of ICT equipment (interactive whiteboard, video) and software in the educational process. The session was led by Alexander Angelov.

The work continued with practical session and brain storming on where in the curriculum SD topics and key competence development can match. The suggestions and findings were put

down to serve as reference for the teachers when they design and write down their own lesson plans.

At the end of the training was held a short session on inquiry of teachers needs. The contribution of the trainees was added to the feedback from the structured interview held in Sofia on 13 March 2012.

The workshop closed with evaluation of the training (the feedback form is attached below) and short talk about the future activities in the framework of the project.

3. Feedback about the training:

The feedback forms were filled in by 29 from 36 of the participants in the training. Several trainees had to leave earlier on the 3rd day of the training in order to catch a transport to their hometowns.

The feedback from the participants in the workshop shows that they were highly satisfied with the training with

- 99,4% satisfaction from the overall organization of the training (4,97 points of 5)
- 94% estimation of the usefulness of the training (4,7 points of 5)
- 100% satisfaction from the lecturers' work (5 points of 5)

None of the sessions and elements of the training was considered "not useful".

As the most useful and interesting sessions the participants pointed the "observation" activity (combined with an outdoor walk), the discussions and sharing of personal experience with the colleagues, as well as the interactive session with the Doga Schools.

The participants in the training stated that the topics of the training are relevant for their practice (93,55%) and that the training was well structured (93,55%). At the end of the training most of them already have ideas how to apply in the practice what they have learned (80,65%). One of every five participants admitted that more exhaustive presentation of the methods/activities would have been useful (19,35%).

Only 5 (from 29 respondents) consider that the topics presented might be difficult to their students (ref. to the sustainable development and inquiry based learning). When considering these answers we should take in consideration that substantial part of the participants work with minority students for whom Bulgarian is not a mother tongue.

Asked to determine the most useful support which they need for understanding and development of the key competences for LLL in the frames of the educational curriculum, teachers show preference to:

- **exchange** of...ideas / experience / good practices – 41,38% of the respondents
- discussions, meetings, sharing (including video-conferencing with the use of interactive whiteboard) – 20,69%
- training – 17,24%
- exchange and training – 20,69%

Some more than 40% of the teachers expressed willingness to participate in the approbation of the lesson plans (the prevailing part of these respondents work in kindergartens and pre-school classes at school). As a reason for negative answers were mentioned: doubts if the available materials are suitable; need of more time for preparation; need of self-preparation; lack of methodology for work; lack of guidelines.

A bit higher number of teachers (45%) expressed willingness to do an interactive session with a colleague from another partner country. The main problem pointed out by most of the teachers is that they do not feel confident enough to speak English. One teacher considered possible implementation with "a translator". Some respondents do not see the benefits of such lesson since "*the children do not learn a foreign language, it will be impossible for them to participate*".

The full data from the feedback of the trainees is presented in a PPT file. (D7-BG-SUSTAIN_Training_assessmen_summary_EN.ppt)

4. Information about the lecturers:

Iglika Angelova: Iglika Angelova is a pedagogical expert with a degree in Slavic philology and specialisation in Speech therapy and Pedagogy for bilingual children; Iglika Angelova is an experienced pedagogic specialist and leader in the development and practical school application of educational games and interactive lessons for children. She develops innovative didactic materials and ICT-based products and is educative consultant for software developing companies. Iglika is well known in Bulgaria and has vast experience in teacher trainings at national and international level.

Iva Ninova: Administrative assistant for SUSTAIN project at CCTA. Iva Ninova has been involved in numerous CCTA activities, including trainings of teachers and trainers, and co-coordinator of project activities at local level. Iva has Bachelor degree in English and American Studies by Sofia University, Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology.

Reni Dimova: Project coordinator. Background: initiator and coordinator with more than 30 implemented projects, among which also educational cooperative projects under Comenius, Lingua and Accompanying measures; extended experience in implementing educational and youth project in the context of the South-East Europe; teacher trainer (incl. trainings on LLP and project management); Master Degree in Bulgarian Philology by Sofia University, Faculty of Slavic Studies.

Alexander Angelov: is technical expert and coordination specialist. Graduated Technical University of Sofia as Engineer; Has rich background in implementing technologies in educational practice. Four years experience in teacher trainings in ICT and educational software in all stages of the education. Experience in software development, interactive educational games /edutainment/, simulation environments and science teaching tools.

6. Conclusions:

The local teacher training workshop in BG was very successful and received very high scores in terms of satisfaction on behalf of the participants. It was organised in 3 consecutive days with a training program of 16 hours distributed between presentations and more theoretical inputs, demonstrations, practical experience and discussions.

The CCTA experts choose to organize the training in this format (consecutive days) because it allows overnight stay for most of the participants and gives more time for informal interaction within the group. In this way the training resembles to a great extent the format of a Comenius qualification course and allows important conclusions to be drawn with the view of the future planning of the program for Teacher Training Module for blended learning (D13) and the organisation of the International Teacher Training Course in June 2013.

The feedback from the participants in the training shows high interest towards different forms of sharing, exchange of experience and interaction with colleagues which brings the conclusion that the SUSTAIN platform (D9) which is under development has good chances to become a virtual “meeting point” for teachers who would share their experience and will use the resources, published there. This aspect from the teachers’ feedback should further be surveyed at local level in the partner countries and conclusions should further be passed to the Romanian partner responsible for the development of the platform.

Certain point of concern is very low level of foreign language competences among the main project target group – pre-primary and primary school teachers.

The data from the BG workshop feedback show that only 12,9% of the respondents are ready to attend a training held in foreign language (some of the respondents count on supporting translation). From the teachers who filled in the feedback questionnaires only about 20% stated that they know/use foreign language, among them:

- 3 respondents mentioned Russian;
- 2 respondents mentioned French;
- 3 respondents mentioned more than one foreign language (in different combinations, most of which include Russian)
- 4 participants mentioned English with levels estimated chiefly as “satisfactory”, “rusty” and “basic”.

These results could be considered representative for the pre-primary and primary school teachers having in consideration the average age within the target group in the country. This issue should be considered as it may be obstacle for active international cooperation during the cross-implementation project stage.

Addendum: Teacher Training Feedback form used at the training.

Addendum

Teacher Training FEEDBACK FORM

1/ How do you rate the training?

(circle the number which corresponds to your opinion, where 1 is “bad” and 5 – “excellent”)

1.1. The overall organization of the training:

1	2	3	4	5
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1.2. How useful was the training for you?

1	2	3	4	5
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1.3. How do you assess the work of the lecturers?

1	2	3	4	5
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2/ What were your expectations when you signed up for the training?

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3/ To what degree were your expectations met?

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4/ Which of the sessions will be useful for your work? Why?

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5/ Which of the sessions will NOT be useful for your work? Why?

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6/ Were you informed about the key competences for LLL before this training?

Yes No

7/ What will be useful for better understanding of the key competences and how to develop them in the frames of the educational programs? (example: training, exchange, etc.)

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8/ Would you say that: (Please, mark all valid statements)

- the presented methods/activities are not applicable in your practice
- the themes are current for your practice
- the training was well structured
- the material will be complicated for your students
- you would prefer international lecturers
- you did not learn anything of significance
- more exhaustive presentation of the methods/activities would have been useful
- you already have ideas how to apply what you have learned in your practice

9/ Would you take part in approbation of the presented methods/activities?

- Yes No

Why? (please comment)

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10/ If you answered with YES on question 7, please add:

10.1/ How old/which grade will be the students you will be working with: :

10.2/ Which subjects you will be working on:

10.3/ How many classes you plan to dedicate to approbation: :

10.5/ Would you try to conduct a class with interactive session with colleague form another country? Yes No

Which subject(s)

11/ Would you like to take part in a training with similar topic in another language?

- Yes; which language? No

12/ What would you recommend to the organizers of the training?

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