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**E LEARNING PROCESS AND OUTCOMES IN DEVELOPING A EUROPEAN
PROFESSIONAL'S NETWORK IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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Abstract: *The paper describes how eLearning media was used in a set of three European projects, from 5 countries, aiming to promote inclusive education.*

Most of the project preparation, implementation and reporting was made through eLearning (email communication, site development, electronic forms filling, internet search, power point preparation and presentation, reporting on a European data base etc).

Important outcomes

- *A web site of the project;*
- *A list of barriers and facilitators;*
- *A Guide on inclusive education;*
- *A rich set of power point presentations.*

Keywords: *Inclusive education, European actors, eLearning process and media*

I. THE PROCESS

1.1. The context

Elearning on inclusive education is a new and strong trend both in the way of learning and sharing and as a key issue on the educational field. Each country had its own way and expertise in using virtual media, as it has also its own history, experiences, cultural conditions, approaches, opportunities and challenges in inclusive education.

Five national associations from England, France, Island, Italy and Romania have decided in 2008 to work together for promoting inclusive education. From Romania the organization participant was 'Association RENINCO Romania'. Each country team had one person as Coordinator and overall Coordination was insured by a person from a French organization. They have managed to implement three transnational European projects (Lifelong learning), during two years (July 2009-June 2011):

- "Partnership of professionals for inclusive education"(Leonardo)
- Families partnership for inclusive education (Grundtvig)
- Persons with disabilities partnership for inclusive education (Grundtvig) – except Romania.

For each Coordinator and country team - aside of the direct meetings, most of the projects preparation, implementation, monitoring&evaluation, final reporting and dissemination was made through

eLearning (email communication, web search, site development, power point preparation and presentation, reporting on a European electronic data base etc).

The main objectives of the projects were:

- To built a web site of the project, focusing on the history and definition of inclusive education in Europe (in the five countries in particular);

- To develop a Guide for each of the target groups – professionals, families and persons with disabilities – through working together;

- To identify the barriers and common solutions for inclusive education.

To very much extent the project has reached these objectives (particularly the first one) by means of eLearning media. The main steps of the process and the outcomes are listed as follows.

1.2. Planning and preparing the projects

The *electronic post (emails) and internet exploration* - on each country national agency for lifelong learning website - were the main means and communication channels on this stage of the process. On writing the particular projects – a total of 14 in the five countries – it was a huge amount of work and time to work in each team to develop clear aims, objectives, activity plans (including visits in each country) and outcomes proposed. The development of the written projects and the needed consultation among teams was a complex process, made at three levels:

- Between the 4 national coordinators and the French coordinator
- Between the national coordinator and the members of each team
- Inside each team

In all these levels of communication the work of each partner organization has had its own contribution. It was a tough task for the Coordinator to synthesize, harmonize and value all contributions. This principle - of valuing all teams contribution, in the sense that no one feels less valued or excluded – was very much inspired by the theme of the projects (inclusion).

One difficulty to overcome was to establish the common core of the projects and the particular aspects for each country.

The planning and preparation phase was achieved very well and all the projects were finalized, in very good coordination to be sent in time and they were all approved.

1.3. Elearning during the implementation of the projects

During the two years of the projects the teams of the five countries have spent together in direct meeting only 18 days. The work required to implement the projects was at least double working days, so *the main tasks were fulfilled mostly via eLearning.*

Apart from the *communication via emailing*, each project has had a *discussion group on yahoo, for ongoing communication.* Power point presentations were prepared and presented during each visit and at the end of the projects.

In this manner the key elements of the project implementation were reached: planning each of the five visits, filling in electronic forms for all the participants, developing the Euro pass for everyone, developing and finalizing the main outcomes planned.

Of course there were enough *difficulties* in eLearning and communication. These were linked in particular with the *differences in using eLearning and also English as project language.* Whereas the Coordinator from each team was keeping a steady electronic communication with the other Coordinators, the other participants (members of each country team) were not in the same situation. This disadvantage had to be diminished on the occasion of the direct visits – in planning and assessing each visit. For many of the participants the project activities have launched challenges but also have offered new opportunities for eLearning and English language learning as well.

1.4. Monitoring&evaluation of the projects via eLearning

The national agencies for lifelong learning (Leonardo and Grundvigt programs) have made a thorough evaluation and monitoring of the projects, in which eLearning had again a major role.

Electronic communication and investigation (Emails and website exploration) were used in various stages of the projects (initial phase and planning, development, final evaluation). There were particular events (meetings) initiated and hosted by the national agency for lifelong learning, in which various

participants which different project participants were asked to make power point presentations and discussions were held based on these. RENINCO was invited to make such a presentation in one such specific event in Bucharest.

Part of the monitoring&evaluation of these projects requested by the National Agency was to post periodically on each participating organization website various information, reporting for instance on the visits in the other countries. This activity was also a good dissemination opportunity.

RENINCO reports can be found for instance on <http://www.renincor.ro/modules/news>.

1.5. Reporting on electronic format

EST (European Shared Treasure) is an electronic data base considered a mirror of the European cooperation especially to partnerships. It has been conceived in such a way that each partner contributes, adding its experience to the European context. EST present all the experiences, in order to demonstrate the added value of each partner.

European Shared Treasure (EST) has been chosen as the official documentation system for Comenius, Leonardo and Grundtvig partnerships in all the European countries participating.

The web space is offered by each National Agency and they provide access data. EST has a multilingual interface and all partnerships in Europe can be traced by any national access point. EST contains materials and outputs of all types and on different supports: photos, texts, music, videos and so on.

The Coordinator of this Project and all partners has to complete the information retrieved from the application form with the outputs of their two-year activity. The electronic forms of this reporting were clear, concise, with a limited number of words such as the information provided to be relevant and organized in accordance with the program objectives. The process of filling in this reports was a rich learning experience for each partner, in particular for the coordinators.

There were of course common and specific results for each partner. Romania did report 36 outputs on EST database.

II. PROJECT OUTCOMES – ELEARNING PRODUCTS

During the process and as a result of eLearning the projects have produced important the following outcomes:

- A web site (<http://inclusiveeducation-leonardo-professionals.blogs.apf.asso.fr>, Utilisateur: leonardoprofessionals, Mot de passe : leonardoprofessionals);
 - A list of barriers and facilitators of inclusive education;
- Additional outcomes were:*
- Tree Guides for professionals, parents and persons with disabilities on inclusive education;
 - A lot of power point presentations linked to the projects development.

2.1. The projects website was designed for all the partners and for all institutions dealing with education. To reach this product the three categories of actors were involved (professionals, families and persons with disabilities) from the five countries (in Romania only two categories). It contains a glossary of inclusion, with the main concepts, in two languages (English and French).

The projects website describes the partners involved, some elements facilitating the understanding of the European and international perspective on inclusive education, based on the experiences collected in the project, on the results and documents obtained.

Various electronic materials were posted on the website of the project and on the websites of all partner associations, including the following ones.

2.2. A list of barriers and facilitators of inclusive education – a synthesis of the professionals work and a result of the debates. After listing barriers and the facilitating factors, the elements which can be barriers and facilitators as well, the list contains the synthesis of the discussion from each country, on the topic of identification of particular aspects: defining inclusion, the major actors, the resources needed – just a few of the analyze points.

2.3. A Guide for each projects group - *one for professionals, one for families and one for persons with disabilities has been developed*, as a working tool, issued from the discussions during the school visits in the 5 countries, form the synthesis of analysis and of conclusions (from international sources) regarding inclusive education. It defines inclusion, suggests a set o principles, identifies solutions for the barriers, and offers concrete examples from each country, regarding policies, practices, cultures and values. It is an open and positive point of view.

2.4. Power point presentations

During the project more than 80 different *power points presentation were produced*.

They were focusing on international documents, legislation and policies regarding inclusive education, on national educational policies in inclusive education, the history of this approach in each country, study cases and experiences, lessons learned in different visits.

One of the more complex ppt presentations is the *Final slide show (album) 2009-2011*. It contains photos which are presenting the countries that had participated (places, traditions, touristic attractions, art objects and towns architecture), as well as the “authors” involved in the project. The photos are proving the good collaboration during seminars, visits, during the attractive free time opportunities in each of the five countries. All are posted on the website of the project in order to be tools for inclusive education dissemination and eLearning instruments.

III. LESSONS LEARNT AND LIMITS OF ELEARNING IN THE PROJECTS

Elearning was to much extent involved in all stages and activities of the projects.

Using the diverse electronic media has allowed the accumulation of a very rich information from each country and from each category of projects participants.

The information gathered both on word and ppt files contains written text but also photos. Therefore the information is more illustrative and convincing, reflecting the complex process, the national, cultural and group differences, the common work as well.

The work on the terminology of inclusive education was more difficult via eLearning, due to the different levels of computer knowledge and skills and different levels of English (as project language).

This kind of work requires more direct meetings and discussions, which were not possible under the project constrains.

Therefore the main terms comprised on the project website are only in English and French, not in Italian Icelandic and Romanian as it was planned initially.

Another limit in eLearning was the limited involvement of the parents and people with disabilities, particularly in designing and using the website. A similar difference was noticed between the participants from Western European countries – more active - and Romania.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The process of eLearning using different media was vital during and for the success of this project.

At the end it offered to all participants - professionals, family members, persons with a disability - the possibility to better understand the inclusion importance and issues and to promote a new perspective in education, via ongoing collaboration between various actors, cultures and experiences.

Working in common for defining inclusive education in five national contexts and describing the barriers and solutions was very challenging but also necessary and rewording, in this moment of the European efforts for defending our European common values.

Collaboration between professionals, families and persons with disabilities is fruitful and beneficial if it takes place via eLearning media.

Because eLearning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge

we consider that persons with a disability and their families in Romania have not yet enough possibility to access and participate on equal bases in such partnership projects. So more resource, courses and other opportunities for eLearning are needed, particularly in Romania.

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