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European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

# STUDY VISIT GROUP REPORT

Group No	2009_095
Title of the visit	Improving the 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle to achieve success
Topic	Improving access, equity, quality and efficiency in education and training: Early learning opportunities
City, country	Porto, Portugal
Type of visit	General Education
Dates of visit	15 - 20 November 2009
Group reporter	Sue Waters

All participants would like to thank Ana Xavier from DREN, who organised the study visit. She was extremely good at sending us relevant information before our visit and during our stay in Porto she was on hand to make sure we were at the right place and at the right time (well nearly!).

The Group would like to record their thanks for the very warm welcome they received from everyone they met in Portugal. As participants grow older and more frail and infirm they will all value their visit to Baião!





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## GOOD PRACTICE

title of the project/ programme/ initiative	country	name of the institution that implements it (if possible, provide a website)	contact person (if possible) who presented the programme to the group	whom the project/ programme/ initiative addresses	what features of the project/programme/initiative make it an example of good practice
Two week Plan 'what I want to learn'	Portugal	Ponte School		pupil	The idea that children write their own learning programme. Encourages child to take responsibility for their own learning. Children are more motivated.
Every child and instrument	Germany Federal Stafe NRW		Eva	pupils	Programme allows every child to have the opportunity to play an instrument. Free of charge for two years
Comprehensive School of Ponte, Vila das Aves	Portugal	Comprehensive School of Ponte, Vila das Aves		pupils	How pupils are encouraged to be responsibility for their own learning. How pupils are encouraged to help each other. How pupils with SEN are integrated in the class. Modest school resources but excellent education provided. Individual education plan for skills and knowledge.



Magellen Project	Portugal			Pupils	It enables all children to have access to computers.
Pre-school education	France		Natalia	pupils	Having pre-school and primary school children taught in one building. Primary schools who offer a pre-school facility. Not compulsory but all children attend
	Germany		Christa		Children are tested at the age of four in German language. If children are unable to complete the test to a satisfactory level they will receive extra support.
	Portugal	Comprehensive School of Ponte, Vila das Aves			Positive relationships between staff and pupils observed in schools.
	Portugal				Use of technology in music lesson
	Portugal	Claúdia Rego and Rita Dias - Aveiro University			In-service teacher training to write Software for whiteboard
	Portugal				In all schools English is compulsory from the first year. English always included in the enrichment activities.
	Portugal	Music Conservatory of Porto			Integrated curriculum in Music School



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During our visit to Portugal we all made presentations to the group about the education systems in our own countries. It was generally felt that these helped us to gain a greater understanding of education in the EU.

We have grouped our findings into two sections: similarities in our educational approaches and differences in our educational approaches.

## SIMILAR APPROACHES IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

### Every Child Matters Agenda in every country

- In UK the Government's aim is for every child, whatever their background or their circumstances, to have the support they need to: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being
- In Portugal very small schools are being closed in order that children can attend a larger school where the opportunity for a broader curriculum is possible to offer. 'Equality for all'
- Ponte School has a special project to try to experiment with different educational methods with pedagogical aims.

### Clusters of schools

- In UK and Sweden clusters are being introduced in some areas. Reasons include saving money as only one head teacher is required and also it is increasingly difficult to find head teachers in some areas.
- In Poland a maximum of 6 secondary schools for a cluster and this works well.
- In Germany schools collaborate to provide more opportunities for more able or less able. In Lower Saxony the Ministry wants to create clusters for Primary schools. Schools can support more able learners through the clustering.
- In Italy four kinds of school cluster exist
  - primary (6 - 11),
  - primary (6 - 11) and first secondary (11-13)
  - first secondary (11-13)
  - second secondary (13 - 19).
- In Turkey schools are beginning to introduce school cluster.
- In France some rural areas have primary clusters and the government are planning to implement large primary school clusters in big cities so that the individual schools will be challenged to improve the general level of education provided.



## **Change of school opening hours - extended days**

- In UK schools have to signpost parents to an 'extended day' but do not have to offer before and after activities themselves. The quality of care provided by before and after school activities can vary. In most areas parents have to pay for this. Food is provided but again parents have to pay. Whole day schooling but not compulsory
- In Germany schools are just starting to open from 7.30am to 5pm.
- In Bulgaria schools are trying to enrich their curriculum by offering extra activities so children can stay in school and receive this education.
- In Turkey some schools use the double shift system: one class in morning and one class in afternoon but the Education Ministry is moving away from this to whole day schooling.
- In Poland schools open at 7am and remain open until 4 - 6pm. Special extra-curricular activities are offered, some run by school staff and others run by local providers. This is free for pupils.
- In Sweden schools are open from 6am to 6pm and this is free to all pupils.

## **Technology**

- Cost of internet Magellan Initiative
- In Turkey: schools/parents purchase computers as importance of ICT is recognised. Parent perception is changing. Computers for educational purposes can be purchased at 18% less than for business or personal use.
- Sweden: schools can't ask parents for money so a long process. 4 computers to share for 20 pupils,
- Italy: computers in ICT suite not classroom. Children use it for 1 hour a week.
- Bulgaria: ICT suite for pupils to use weekly.
- Poland and Bulgaria: National Programme to provide free computers and internet access to teachers and pupils. Financed by EU and Government.
- Germany: the community is responsible for providing all equipment so computer provision varies from across the country.
- In UK there are some local initiatives to help all pupils have access to computers

## **Inspection**

- In Italy there is no inspection
- In Turkey schools are inspected but results remain in the school for school to use in order to plan improvements.
- In Germany schools are inspected and results are made available to school and local community and regional educational authorities to use in order to plan improvements.
- In Sweden and UK results available to all.

- In Poland inspection is changing so that in future schools will be inspected externally as well as being expected to take part in self-evaluation. In the future outside evaluation of schools

## DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

### **Teachers Contest**

- In France schools do not select their own teachers.
- In all other countries schools generally select the staff they employ.

### **Role of headteacher - responsibilities**

- In UK headteacher has high level of autonomy. Head has delegated budget and is responsible for 'running the business': hiring of staff, maintenance of buildings, purchasing of resources, designing curriculum with reference to government guidance.
- Head teacher lack of autonomy - staffing, finance, curriculum

### **Delegated budget to school:**

- In Bulgaria, Sweden, Poland and UK the head teacher is given a budget to cover all aspects of running the school - staffing, maintenance of buildings, educational resources.
- In Germany and UK there are some Private and Voluntary Sector Schools where private companies fund the buildings and the public sector fund the education provision and rent to buildings.

## CHALLENGES

Participants agreed that the challenges faced by Portugal are similar to those faced in their own countries. It was agreed that there are three main challenges are:

1. Finance
2. Opposition to change
3. Geographical limitations

### Finance

Participants all agreed that financial constraints are a limiting factor in the organisation of all educational institutions. At Ponte School there was a very high staff:pupil ratio and this enabled the students to work in a very individual and independent way but this was obviously at a large financial cost.

Participants agreed that their educational organisations all had financial constraints on them and most had to manage within a limited budget.

### Opposition to change

Participants agreed that many people are opposed to change as they fear the unknown. It is important to try to change people's perception of change but often it is only with hindsight that the value of change is appreciated. One example of this is that many parents in Portugal were opposed to the shutting of small village schools but can now see the benefits of the new system of school clusters which can offer pupils a wider educational experience and the use of better facilities.

### Geographical limitations

In Portugal one of the main challenges is the geography of the country and the distribution of the population. Participants agreed that this is a common challenge.

Most countries have high numbers of students in the towns and cities and small numbers in outlying areas. In Turkey many schools in cities have to run a double shift system where the school buildings offer morning lessons for one set of pupils and afternoon school for another.

## SOLUTIONS

Effective and innovative solutions identified that participating countries apply to address the challenges mentioned in question

In Portugal

- School Clusters

Many countries have various systems of clustering schools. In Sweden clusters are usually small and are done for organisational purposes.

We can see that in Portugal the School Clusters are used to ensure pupils have a quality curriculum and that all pupils have the same chances.

Participants discussed the idea of clustering and some felt that the development of clustering might mean that it is not always so easy to see the individual child.

We recognise the great advances that have been made in Portugal in redeveloping the education system. The School Clusters appear to have solved the problem of the isolation of children in remote areas but villages may have suffered in terms of losing part of their community.

Assessment of the transferability of policies and practices.

Participants all agreed that whenever educationalists visit schools or discuss policy or practice there are always ideas that can be taken away. Some called this sharing, borrowing, poaching or stealing ideas. It is important to acknowledge that all schools operate within their own unique community. It is not possible to clone a school that is successful in one town and make it work in another community. However, it is possible to take examples of good practice from one school and integrate them into another, whether in the same town or across the border of countries.

- Clustering

In many countries the government are moving towards a system of school clustering or federating. Participants expressed many concerns. In Germany some areas have tried the system of clustering but found that large schools appeared to cause problems of violence and bad behaviour so they are now looking for different solutions. Large school centres were designed to create equality of opportunity but in reality the less able students get lost in the system. Grouping schools together can be positive in terms of sharing good practice and resources but there does need to be a culture of collaboration. Members of a school cluster must have the desire to work together.

- Magellan Initiative

All participants were very impressed by the Magellan Initiative to provide computers for all. Everyone agreed that access to computers and the internet was a problem in their country but the Magellan Initiative seems to be providing a solution.

Many participants were impressed by the in-service training project for developing software for teachers to use with the whiteboards.

A very interactive music lesson was observed which used ICT to deliver it. Participants were impressed with the level of concentration and participation of the pupils.

## THE WAY FORWARD NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

All participants strongly agreed that the idea of continuing to develop partnerships is an important aspect of a study visit. Everyone agreed that they wanted to develop the friendships they had made with colleagues to further improve their professional lives. The following is a list of ways that participants intend to continue working together.

UK: Participants have been asked to send a simple recipe that can be cooked by children in the UK as part of a project of 'Recipes from around the world'

Germany: Make a project with School Cluster of Faies regarding transition to work.

France: Participants have been asked to send a short song from their country for young children to sing.

Italy: Who would like to join Comenius project about the study of nature, focussing on bird watching.

Turkey: Would like to work with any projects with any of the participants. Would like to implement some of the ideas of the Ponte School. Have discussed ideas with staff of school and will be in contact.

Poland/Germany: Looking at in-service training ideas - how to help teachers to plan individual support for children.

## THE MOST INTERESTING INFORMATION

Participants agreed this list of the most interesting and useful information from host country:

- We recognise the considerable effort and financial commitment that is going into the reform of the education system in Portugal.
- Education Authorities in our countries should be made aware of the Magelan project and how it enabling all pupils to have access to new technologies.
- In Portugal teachers have a lot of assistants to support them. During lunchtime assistants supervise children. Assistants supervised corridors.
- Participants were very impressed with the special facilities provided for children with special education al needs in the schools we visit.
- The idea of the Teachers Contest means that schools who find it hard to attract staff would be fully staffed. In Sweden it can be very difficult to find staff who wish to work in more rural areas or in the northern part of the country and a Teachers Contest may solve this problem.

## ORGANISATION OF THE VISIT

This part of the report will not be published but it will be made available to the organiser and will be used by national agencies and Cedefop to monitor and improve implementation of the study visits programme.

We recognise the value of ongoing feedback as a way of ensuring that the programme is at all times a responsive and dynamic initiative, meeting the needs of its various participants and target audiences. In this section you are invited to give us your feedback on several factors that, in our opinion, contribute to an effective visit.

1. Discuss within the group and check if you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please mark only **one** box () that expresses most closely the opinion of the entire group. Please use Question 2 of this section to elaborate on your responses, if needed.

		All agree	Most agree	Most disagree	All disagree	Not applicable
e.g.	The size of the group was good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.1.	The programme of the visit followed the description in the catalogue.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2.	There was a balance between theoretical and practical sessions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3.	Presentations and field visits were linked in a coherent and complementary manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4.	The topic was presented from the perspectives of the following actors of the education and training system in the host country:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4.1.	- government and policy-makers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4.2.	- social partners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4.3.	- heads of institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4.4.	- teachers and trainers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.4.5.	- students/trainees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		All agree	Most agree	Most disagree	All disagree	Not applicable
1.4.6.	- users of services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.5.	There was enough time allocated to participants' presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.6.	The background documentation on the theme provided before the visit helped to prepare for the visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.7.	Most of the group received a programme well in advance.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.8.	The information provided before the visit about transportation and accommodation was useful.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.9.	The organiser accompanied the group during the entire programme.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.10.	The size of the group was appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.11.	The group comprised a good mixture of participants with diverse professional backgrounds.	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.12.	There were enough opportunities for interaction with representatives of the host organisations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.13.	There was enough time allocated for discussion within the group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.14.	The Cedefop study visits website provided information that helped to prepare for the visit.	<input type="checkbox"/> yse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## SUMMARY

1. Having summarised all your reflections and impressions, please indicate how satisfied you are with your participation in the study visit. Indicate the number of participants for each category, e.g.

Very satisfied

Very satisfied  Satisfied  Somewhat satisfied  Not satisfied  Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

2. What elements and aspects of the study visits do you think could be changed or improved?

- Good to have a daily short session at the end of the day with the organiser in order to have opportunity for further questions or information about what has been seen.
- Would have liked more time in school observing classes.
- Timetable too busy. Participants need more time to reflect and absorb what they have seen.

3. If there is anything else you would like to write about that is not included in the above questions, please feel free to write below or attach a separate sheet.

We would like to record our thanks for the very warm welcome we have received from everyone we have met.

We would like to Ana for all the information she sent to participants before the visit.

Please submit the report to Cedefop ([studyvisits@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:studyvisits@cedefop.europa.eu)) **within one month** after the visit.