

Multiculturalism, Migration, Mathematics Education and Language

Project Number: 526333-LLP-1-2012-1-IT-COMENIUS-CMP

Rationale of and background to the project

The multicultural nature of modern society constitutes one of the most significant changes to have influenced schools in many European countries, especially at primary and middle school level. The teacher's job is all the more difficult because he/she is usually not sufficiently prepared to deal with the new classroom context with pupils having a migrant background, coming from countries with different cultures and different languages. The teacher is seldom aware of the need to rethink and if necessary modify his/her methodological and pedagogical approach. This attitude is even more evident in maths teachers who often consider their subject universal and culture-free.

Little has been done in Europe as far as maths teaching in multicultural contexts is concerned. The different languages and cultures present in the classroom make the teaching/learning process even more arduous than it already is, especially for pupils from minority cultures and/or with a migrant background or for Roma pupils.

This project envisages the design and piloting of materials for both the initial and in-service training of middle school maths teachers who constitute the project's primary target group. The secondary target group is their pupils, in particular those from other cultures.

The materials will be produced after careful analysis of the video recordings of teaching activities. Their focus will be also on the role of language in the communication of mathematical concepts and their aim will be to stimulate the maths teacher's awareness of the need to find a satisfactory balance between mathematical language and classroom language, especially when dealing with pupils with a different culture and language.

The project's training proposals will be aimed at promoting maths teaching strategies which are relevant to activities and problems taken from everyday life (addressing Comenius specific objective b) including that of different cultures in order to highlight their positive aspects (addressing Comenius specific objective a). The project furthermore addresses several of the LLP programmes specific objectives, namely objective a (to contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European perspective [...]), objective d (to reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion, [...] intercultural dialogue, gender equality[...]), and objective k (to encourage the best use of results, [...] and to exchange good practice [...] to improve the quality of education and training). We also want to refer to the ET 2020 strategic framework, which states "promoting equity and social cohesion" and the need to "acquire key competences" (one of which is mathematical competence, another one is cultural awareness) for all citizens. It specifically mentions as one of its goals "to ensure [...] that all learners – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and [...] migrants – complete their education [...]. Education should promote intercultural competences [...]".

Most of the consortium members have co-operated in several previous projects (such as the Comenius 2.1 projects: "IDMAMIM: Mathematics and Multiculturalism", "Lower Secondary School Teacher Training in Mathematics", "Making Mathematics Teachers Mobile" and "CLIL across Contexts: a scaffolding framework for the CLIL teacher education") and in several meetings. During these co-operations the need for addressing multicultural issues in mathematics teaching has been mentioned. This led to the idea of preparing a project proposal dealing specifically with this issue.