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Developing project organization model at the schools participated in comenius school partnership projects

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to develop a project organization model at the schools which have participated in Comenius School Partnership Projects (CSPP), deriving from part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme Comenius action. Establishing a project organization at schools has been necessary, when considered that CSPP has had a two-year duration including considerable activities which should be achieved through effective cooperation and communication, as well as acquiring basic life skills and competences for active European citizenship. The study was organized in three dimensions: determining the scope of the Project, explaining organization process (structure, staffing, equipping) and building the CSPP organization model in accordance to findings derived from document analysis and literature. The organization model developed in this study consisted of six units that are *education-training and Europe; reporting and data entry; results and dissemination; school-parent cooperation and relations between local organizations and society; communication and coordination; and monitoring and evaluation.*

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1. Introduction

One of the considerable steps for schools which participate in Comenius School Partnerships Project (CSPP) is to develop the organization of project implementation. When considered CSPP has a two year activity calendar, and the activities taking part in the calendar must be suitable for the aims, the need for an organization model at schools which participate in CSPP would be seen clearly. In addition to activity calendar, some decisions should be made during the project process and implementation of them efficiently also indicate the need for this organization.

Organization is a tool to get people work together efficiently (Drucker, 1999, p. 11). Leaders consider that organization acts within its designed style. If it is not designed accurately, it will be like a racing car badly designed and it would probably be unsuccessful (Stanford, 2007, p. 3). Within organization process, it is aimed to create regularity from irregularities, and the structure which will be established at the end of this process helps to decrease the conflict among the individuals and set up suitable environment with common aims in terms of work and responsibility issues (Aydın, 2005, p. 142). As a result, if inaccurate organization occurs it may be said that many

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problems in the issues regarding implementation of decisions and plans will be faced, and the project will not serve its aims.

2. Scope of CSPP

Comenius programme, which takes part in EU Lifelong Learning Programmes and consists of pre-school, primary and secondary education, with based on Lisbon aims, seeks to establish knowledge and understanding related to European culture and language diversities, and values between students and education staff, to empower the cooperation, and to make students acquire the basic skills and competencies needed for their personal development through becoming active European citizen (Ulusal Ajans, 2011). By means of the cooperation developed through Comenius projects, partner countries find opportunities to understand each other better by learning their way of life and thinking (European Commission, 2008, p. 12-13). The schools within the project partnerships which are established in either bilateral or multilateral way maintain working on common issues according to their interests.

The activity proposals in CSPP can follow: project meetings among the participant institutions; staff and student exchange; sharing the good implementations and experiences; fieldwork, project research; drafting, publishing and dissemination of documentation; producing technical objects, drawings, art objects; performances; organization of exhibitions, production and dissemination of information material; linguistic preparation of teachers in the target language(s); co-operation with other projects in related subject areas; self-evaluation activities; and dissemination of project experience and outcomes etc (European Commission, 2011). As concrete outcomes booklet, brochure, or DVD/CD-ROM can be prepared; also others can follow such as exhibitions, web site, guidebook, artistic performance or produced videos etc. Since Comenius projects focus on the cooperation process, all experiences derived from this process can be accepted as a product.

A grant will be transferred to partner schools in accordance to planned minimum number of mobilities, which means exchange travels of pupils and education staff to partner countries (European Commission, 2011). In addition to mobilities, the local project activities can be financed by the grant. To receive total amount of grant, the partner schools have to carry out minimum mobilities. However a grant agreement between legal representative of partner institution and authority of national agency is signed on what results, grant rules and other concerning conditions are should be undertaken by both sides. When the agreement entered into force, 80% of grant is transferred to school account. And the remaining 20% is transferred at the end of the project on approval of final report which especially indicates that the results and minimum number of mobilities stated in project application form are succeeded. Hence the travel tickets, boarding passes and participation certificates, which prove the mobilities, should be kept and submitted with final report to national agency at the end of the project (European Commission, 2008, p. 27). As a result, because schools do not receive any extra financial support after total grant determined in project application form; they should manage their expenditures efficiently.

Since Comenius projects give opportunities for international approach to partnership theme and cross-curriculum development, teachers in different disciplines should take part in the project. In this point, in each school a project team which entails interdisciplinary approach should be set up in terms of full participation. To achieve the aims of the project, school management, teaching staff and others should work as a team. Besides, all pupils should be given opportunity to participate in projects focused on the issues regarding student motivation. And principally active participation of pupils in the steps which involve planning, organization and evaluation of the activities should be ensured (European Commission, 2008, p. 29).

The activities that partners do throughout the two year time are stated chronologically in the work programme. And in this programme; the definition and approximate date of mobilities and activities, and in which partners participate are given (Education and Culture DG, 2011).

The international projects such as CSPP give the opportunity to schools to build new connections. Therefore, schools should play an active role, be entrepreneur, and convince the potential partners upon the prospective contributions throughout concerning partnership. In this meaning, contacting with education management departments and authorities of professional and other local organizations will be useful to make them participate in the project and support the project (European Commission, 2008, p. 30).

Monitoring and evaluation of the project are other critical points to make project successful. Throughout monitoring and evaluation, determination of the needs, adaptation to aims of partnership and contribution of project process to school in a high level can be possible (European Commission, 2008, p. 32).

One of the critical steps during the CSPP process is dissemination of the results. The dissemination means that experiences and project results are shared (European Commission, 2008, p. 33). How to share the results in international, national, local and community throughout lifelong learning is stated in the project application form (Education and Culture DG, 2011, p. 20). Local and regional authorities and businesses such as neighboring schools, parents, teacher-training institutions, and universities may have an interest in these results. So it is important that preparation of dissemination plans consist of these questions such as how, when and where (European Commission, 2008, p. 33).

For schools accepted to partnership, some suggestions through the experiences of teachers who participated in CSPP may follow to: inform whole school and local community about the success of accepted project, and receive their support; take considerable steps for practice and hold press; contact with contact persons and education staff continually and effectively; determine the communication tools such as e-mail, fax, telephone, video conference etc.; hold meeting for people who participate in project to ensure their commitment and motivation; share the results quickly with school and others to make theory and practice together; make all staff have clear ideas about project process; record all results, products, success and concerning issues constantly; keep concerning documents to prove mobilities; keep accounts of expenditures for accurate management and monitoring project grant; consider personal exchange that affects the participation; and follow the aims and work calendar (European Commission, 2008, p. 28).

3. Organization Process

Organization process consists of *building structure, staffing and equipping* dimensions (Bursalioglu, 2010). In other words, organization is a process which transforms the plans into action (Edwards, 2007, p. 37). To build a healthy organization, one of the considerable points is aim of the organization. All elements and sources should be appropriate to common aim (Aydın, 2005, p. 142). Organization design starts with its vision/mission (Stanford, 2007, p. 8). When taking into account that many things change, the job for arranging the organization becomes usually a temporarily issue. Consequently, organization design should be flexible, and permit to consider peoples' ideas taking part in the organization (Stanford, 2007, p. 8). In addition to the need for organization structure in a modern organization, one should keep in mind that there is no only one accurate organization. In stead of searching accurate organization; looking ahead, developing and testing are needed. In fact, organization is the one that fulfils the task (Drucker, 1999, p. 17).

Leaders agree on those principles which are organization design: is shaped through strategy and work issue of organization; means thinking organization as a holistic way; is a serious matter, needs intensive sources even if it is carried out well; and is made for next better than now (Stanford, 2007, p. 3).

Building the structure entails that degrees of authority and responsibility and relations among these degrees are determined (Bursalioglu, 2010, p. 109). Organization structure can be defined as establishment of patterns of relations among organization elements. And the structure reflects the network of relations, how to coordinate this network, and powers and mechanisms which consist of this coordination (McShane, & Travaglione, 2003, p. 4; Phillips, 2011, p. 2; Madura, 2007, p. 277; Stanford, 2007, p. 4). Organization should be transparent, and people in this organization should know and understand the structure (Drucker, 1999, p. 13).

While establishing an education system, firstly the aims are taken into account and the tasks are determined in accordance to these aims (Bursalioglu, 2010, p. 20). In this meaning, it may be said that the aims and required actions are analyzed systematically, and then the tasks are decided and defined clearly and accurately. However good definitions can help to determine the authorities and responsibilities and within this way prevent the possible conflicts on task-authority-responsibility. After tasks and activities are determined and classified, the qualifications of staff ought to be decided (Buluç, 1996, p. 4). Staff must be given the authority to conduct the tasks which are designated. Furthermore, since responsibility is connected with authority, both of these should be together to make the tasks be achieved (Lunenburg, and Ornstein, 2000, p. 26). After appointing the staff, the relations among the staff in different positions in organization should be decided in accordance to system of authority-responsibility

(Ayдын, 2005, 139; Ghuman, 2010, p. 239). As the organization model is based on tasks, unnecessary repetitions and coordination conflicts may be prevented (Bursalıođlu, 2010, p. 110).

Staffing: Staffing means employing, training, moving up and contribution to management (Koparal, 2004, 9). At least two people whose skills and energy can be used through common aims are required within a structure (Ghuman, 2010, p. 260). After deciding authority and responsibility in each level, persons should be appointed (Ayдын, 2005, p. 139). In this regard, the focus point is that the right person must be in the right position and time (Ghuman, 2010, p. 322). Also it entails that some persons can have authority to make the last decision in a certain point (Drucker, 1999, p. 13).

Equipping: It is clear that some equipment is needed to fulfil the tasks. During this process, either deficiencies or excesses may cause organizations failure fulfil the tasks, or cause cost lost. For this, tasks can be accepted as a starting point. Later, equipment requirement for each task is determined orderly within a table. To avoid the excesses common equipment can be preferred depending on the situations of task. Also during the process, focusing on future and acting according to this point can prevent the potential risks.

4. Building CSPP Organization Model

While developing CSPP organization model, task based approach were used in this study to make the project serve its aims effectively, since the nature of these projects entail to fulfil considerable tasks to achieve the aims. For this approach, firstly the tasks which derive from CSPP nature were searched, analyzed and grouped according to their matches (see Table 1). Then units were established for those groups and named.

Table 1. Name of the table

Tasks	Units
- Applying the work programme (activity calendar)	Education-Training and Europe
- Empowering European dimension	
- Integration of the project with curriculum and learning activities	
- Developing new and creative approaches and through this way to create value in learning-teaching process	
- Indicating implementations of planned activities and reporting to National Agency (NA)	Reporting and Data Entry
- Preparing Progress Report, presenting to school and sending to NA.	
- Preparing Final Report which will be submitted at the end of the project to NA.	Results and Dissemination
- Participation of pupils actively in planning, monitoring and evaluation jobs	
- Entering the data regarding applications and results of project to European Shared Treasure database	
- Recording the activities, outputs, data and derived successes also concerned issues on time	
- Keeping travel tickets, boarding passes, attending certificates as well as concerned documents with agreement	
- Preparing dissemination plan and updating constantly	
- Sharing the results with community and press activities	
- Exhibitions, socio-cultural activities	
- Designing, preparing and sharing the products such as booklet, brochure or CD/DVD	
- Ensuring interest of parents to project and, if possible, taking their commitment	
- Ensuring active support of whole school, parents and local community	
- Contacting with legal representatives of organizations particularly situated locally and obtaining their support	
- Communication between partners; transmitting information, question, suggestion and desires.	Communication and Coordination
- Additional tasks (holding meetings etc.)	
- Participation of teachers within interdisciplinary way and building a team to ensure support of whole school.	Monitoring and Evaluation
- Ensuring that school management, teaching staff and others work together as a team	
- Taking full support of school management	
- Monitoring the project process and evaluation	Monitoring and Evaluation
- Monitoring expenditures and project grant budget with respect to legal regulations	
- Fulfilling minimum mobilities for both teaching staff and pupils committed in application form	

Figure 1 shows the CSPP organization model developed on tasks-units and its features are stated below: The relations among the units are flexible and open to all kind of communication; the conflicts are solved within leadership of *communication and coordination* unit; degrees of authority and responsibility are given to each unit transparently with school management in accordance to ideas taken by staff in project organization. The activities, demands, roadmap and proceedings related to project and system within social environment of school are talked over, evaluated, decided and written by *reporting and data entry* at the meetings by units which are held periodically.

As staffing; School principal, vice staff of principal to *monitoring and evaluation* and contact person of CSPP to *communication and coordination*, and other staff through their interest and skills to available units are appointed. The project staff in those units works coordinately through leadership of school management and contact person according to common aims of project, and can exchange among the units. And if need, some units can be combined or enlarged in some circumstances such as insufficient number of staff, or different project aims that entail extra units. As equipping; equipment requirements are analyzed and common requirements are combined; alternative equipments are determined; both deficiencies and exceeds are decided; cost-effectiveness analysis is applied to find available alternatives; all these processes are reported, and then the needs are covered according to report. *Monitoring and evaluation* coordinates these activities with others.

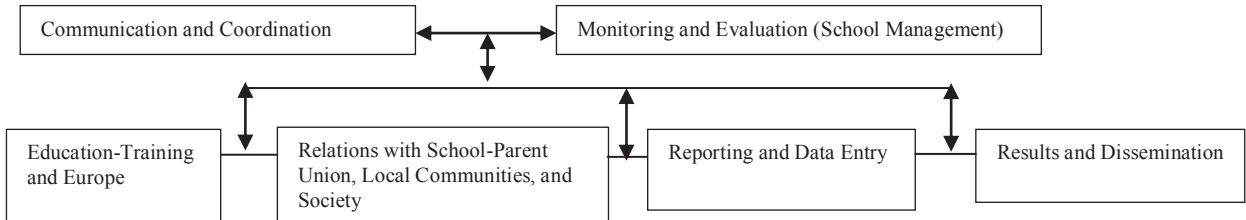


Figure 1. Comenius School Partnership Projects Organization Model

5. Results

In this study, the following questions are generally tried to enlighten: What are the considerable tasks regarding CSPP? How can the tasks be grouped? Which units can be established and suitable with task-group matches? What structure model is available for the units? Through background of CSPP, this study indicates the contextual fundamentals of an organization model which entail team work and open system to both learning and social environment which differ from any strict approaches. Besides, it should be kept in mind that when considering the shaping of organization is usually a temporary issue, this model, which consists of six units, can be developed or used to set up new models by schools since they have different condition such as project aims, school management structure, staff profiles, learning and social environment etc. In conclusion; as CSPP is considered within its general aims, the need for an organization in schools which conduct this project will be seen inevitably, and this need entails much more than conducting projects by focusing solely on work calendar of projects in application forms.

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