Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme

A Process Evaluation Report of the Project of ECECC

(**E**mbedding a **C**ulture of **E**nterprise and **C**reativity in the **C**urriculum)

Evaluator:
Ph.D Lotta Svensson
FoU Hälsingland
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Process Evaluation Report, ECECC

The Lisbon strategy points out the need for creativity, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Skills that go far beyond an academic standpoint, the issue of employability, adaptability and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship is critical to both the short and long term development of Europe. The European Council has concluded, "promoting creativity and innovations is an area in which quality and efficiency could benefit from cooperation at a European level".

The ECECC project – Embedding a Culture of Enterprise and Creativity in the Curriculum – therefore aims to promote creativity and entrepreneurial spirit within the school curriculum in Europe. This by giving the teachers the opportunity to test different methods in a safe environment at a recurrent European educational event by using a non-contextual dependent method, i.e. the focus is on the effects of implementing the above-mentioned initiative in the classroom. The primary target group is teachers in school education and the secondary target group are school managers at the same level.

In the short-term perspective the ECECC project will give teachers in Europe access to training opportunities as well as "hands-on" knowledge concerning creativity and entrepreneurial learning through transfer of know-how. The expected long-term impact of the ECECC is to deepen and develop the creative entrepreneurial learning both through educational possibilities as well as on a more scientific note.

The overall aims of the ECECC project are:

- To promote creativity and growth of an entrepreneurial spirit within the school curriculum in Europe by giving teachers the opportunity to test/practice different methods in a safe environment at a European Educational Event (EEE) i.e. teachers "daring to do".

- To develop the concept that to be enterprising is to have a global mindset that includes skills, behaviors and attitudes and is not rooted in business and economics.

- To provide processes to override the problems of implementing "one" entrepreneurial pedagogic by not using one universal application, i.e present a range of approaches focusing on the effects and values of the pupils instead of a pedagogical method itself.

- To provide teachers with the relevant skills, attitudes and behaviors to embed a spirit of enterprise and creativity in the classroom and the

curriculum so as to promote children's natural creativity in early years and support the continued development of this natural creativity in all subjects at all levels in the school educational system.

- To foster interchange and cooperation amongst teachers at different levels in school education by developing an EEE and educational material where best practice cases are presented, explored and delivered.

- To enhance the European dimension in teacher training by creating a regular EEE and a dynamic European educational material.

- To increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, by giving teachers the opportunity to reflect and analyze their own profession (in regards to creativity and innovation) from a scientific standpoint through (like in medicine) paper conference within the concept of a regular EEE.

The main outputs of the ECECC project are:

- A European Educational Event (EEE)
- Transnational workshops
- Educational Material
- Owner exploitation and sponsor agreements
- Development of a website

Evaluation Focus

The EU-commission is now recommending a new approach when it comes to evaluation, where the new term is "On-going evaluation". The task for this kind of evaluation is to explore how the various projects are striving for their goals and to point out what needs to be improved. The purpose is to improve action strategies working with involved practitioners. The evaluator's role is to deliver knowledge which contributes to action and strategic choices. The proximity to the participants is therefore important as well as continuity and sustainability. Methodology is chosen depending on the task (Svensson, Brulin, Jansson & Sjöberg 2009).

This evaluation is formative, which means it focuses mainly on the process during the course of the project. A process evaluation starts at an early stage of the project and repetitively offers feedback (especially to the project managers) to improve the focus of study and is a flexible way because it allows different methods to be used. Through the systematic feedback at the steering committee meetings the evaluation serves as a support for learning and critical review, and will be useful for the development of the project (Tessmer 1993, George and Cowan 1999, Chen 2004, Svensson et al 2009.

The contract says that "the evaluator provides external evaluation and provides the contractor and the partners of the ECECC project with input regarding options and possibilities in order to assist the ECECC project to reach its objectives. The evaluator will also be accessible to the partners of the ECECC project in connection to transnational activities in order to give input regarding the evaluation that the project itself is to undertake. As shown in the project objectives the evaluator is expected to take the role of a "critical friend" as well as a support for the project manager and the steering committee by bringing points of view at the focus group meetings and dialogues with the project management. In the application form it says that this WP "will result in a written report but most importantly be a process support during the project".

In this project the evaluator has followed the project by observations at meetings, email discussions, interviews and inquiry forms to the participants and dialogues with them and the project manager. The evaluator is part of the mailing list and chat groups and follows the conversations there. At the meetings the evaluator has been conducting interviews with the participants about their opinion of the state of their own work packages (WP), as well as the whole project. After each meeting the participants has been asked to answer a questionnaire about their opinion; of the state of the project and their own WP. The answers have then been summarized and presented at the meetings and are part of the foundation for the evaluation. At the meeting in Czech Republic, in January 2011, a preliminary evaluation was presented and discussed (see appendix 1) and each participant made after that an individual evaluation based on the expectations that they presented after the first meeting

The evaluator has been present at six out of seven steering committee meetings and the state of the project has been continuously discussed at these meetings, with a starting point in the observations and standpoints that the evaluator has presented.

The partner from England has, with offer of support from the evaluator, evaluated the events, and the Swedish partner from Gävle Högskola has evaluated the prototypes with input from the external evaluator.

The Process of the Project

During the first gatherings the steering group discussed what the various concepts of the goal actually represent, and a significant amount of time was spent on discussing criteria for describing practical examples. The discussions were educating and demonstrated amplitude within each country and showed how diverse the definitions of entrepreneurship and creativity are even *within* each country. The interest for this type of conceptual discussions has been varying among the participants – for some it has been perceived as absolutely critical, and for others as an overly time consuming immersion.

To operationalize the concepts to a reasonably common understanding for what they represent was crucial, and when the participants eventually agreed around some explanatory concepts the work to find these interesting examples in each country still remained to be done. Unclear conditions and some problems of finding and make connections to the "best practices" resulted in the first "Sharing of knowledge" meeting only to consist of the steering committee and two Swedish expert teachers. Continuing uncertainty regarding this has resulted in on-going discussions and since the searching has been revised from "best practices" to "good practices", the numbers of expert teachers, school leaders and school related artists from the participating countries have increased at every meeting. At the final conference in Sweden there were almost 25 expert teachers from the project directly involved in the conference.

The Lead Partner (Sweden) has been forced to change Project Manager four times. This is because of natural causes and the human factor; twice a project manager changed employer and one was put on disability. For the first four steering committee meeting there was a new project manager every time.

There were changes also in other countries participating partners organizations. Both in Italy and the Czech Republic the employment conditions have changed, although the same people were able to remain in the steering committee. On Estonia's behalf the organizational changes resulted in them pulling out of the project. The varying organizational confusions and one parental leave led to that the steering committee as a whole couldn't meet until January of 2011.

Out of the interviews with the participants and the inquiry questions some things are to be noticed. Several of the participants are part of this kind of European projects for the first time. The members of the steering committee come from different educational backgrounds and therefore perceive differently what is expected of them in this project and also have different expectations of what the benefits of this project will be. The frequent shift of project manager and the lack of continuous dialogue and information have resulted in that it has taken a long time for the participants' responsibilities to be clearly understood. One reason for the slow start of the project is that there was confusion about what was to be expected from each country. The fact that the goal, in the end, was to create a handbook and an event was not entirely understood in the beginning among the participants. After the first meeting, when the participants expressed their expectations of the project, the event goal is not mentioned at all; instead a more diffuse social outcome with hope for increased knowledge of the topic is stressed.

At the meeting, halftime, in the Czech Republic (Jan. 2011) the members of the steering committee were asked to evaluate the project based on the expectations they had at the first meeting in Söderhamn, Sweden in January 2010. Based on the expectations and hopes that the participants expressed at the beginning of the project, such as:

- gaining more knowledge and learning more about development when meeting with the other countries and
- hearing their thoughts and sharing their culture,

the participants are, at this point, expressing great satisfaction with the meetings from a social point of view, but also from the learning and the network they built. Additionally, the participants feel they have learned a lot about what it means to be a part of this kind of project and both negative and positive feedback was received.

Several of the participants have, during the course of the project, re-evaluated their expectations of what is possible to implement, especially with regards to what is time wise feasibly possible to accomplish. All the participants felt that they had too little time to concentrate on making a good job in the project, between the meetings. Consequently there is less satisfaction about the time between the meetings. Confusion about goals, roles and responsibilities as well as lack of communication has caused frustration. Even though each WP has their own area of responsibility, they are all depending on the input from others in order to complete and fulfill the tasks given, and the lack of response is perceived as a holdback which prevents progress within their own work. In addition this also causes insecurity and questions whether there is anything happening in the project at all.

Several of the participants meant that the meeting in the Czech Republic was clarifying, the project goals were established and the various areas of responsibility became clear. The frustration caused by the lack of communication was expressed and many good examples from different countries were presented at the "Sharing of knowledge" meeting and that helped anchor and clarify the relations of the concepts to the promised handbook and the future event.

After the meeting in the Czech Republic, where the areas of responsibility were clarified the partners went home inspired. The work with the handbook was intensified, the website was developed and the content and format of the test event in Milan were discussed via e-mail. But the level of response is still low - and the level of frustration is rising because the due date for presenting a result is approaching.

When the steering committee gathered next time, and was magnificently greeted in Cremona, there were still discrepancies about what the upcoming test event in Milan was going to entail. The good ambitions and suggestions for improved communications present when the group met in Czech Republic had not fully been translated into action. Subsequently, the tension and frustration levels were relatively high at the start of the meeting and the different ideas regarding the structure, resulted in long discussions. Before the end of the day, the steering committee had reached an agreement, and the test event was performed in a good and appreciated way.

A lesson from the test event was that it had been beneficial for all the partners to have known more about the venue before the event, so the next steering committee meeting was decided to be in Söderhamn, Sweden, to be able to make good planning for the final event. At that meeting, in October 2011, there were still frustration because of the tension between high ambitions and lack of time in the own organization and lack of communication, but most of the focus was on the upcoming final event. The expert teacher from Sweden had a central role, to show all facilities and to arrange a most appreciated "Sharing of knowledge" meeting, where the visiting teachers from UK, Czech Republic and Italy had the opportunity to visit Swedish schools.

Still the opinions among the participants in the steering committee are that the meetings are good social opportunities to learn and get knowledge about other countries experiences and obstacles. The frustration that the others don´t contribute as much as been wished is at this point of the process lower, and all of the partners are focusing to make the best of their own responsibilities. The final event is approaching and at lot of practical issues are to be solved. The project manager is overloaded with other work tasks and the frustration of the lack of coordination and support from the project manager are rising. The Swedish expert teacher takes a lot of responsibility for the practical issues. At this point the employer, the Municipality of Söderhamn, lifts off some of the regular workload from the Project Manager, but the lack of coordination continues to be a source of frustration for the partners.

Finally the event becomes a big success! Lots of people (about 1200 persons) are contributing and are visiting, and there are attendants from 10 European countries visiting; Czech, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and United Kingdom. And the evaluations of the event, from the English partner and from the Swedish organizer, show a huge satisfaction with the arrangement and inspirational seminars.

In this writing moment the handbook is not present, but the work in progress copy is a very ambitious piece of work.

Summary

This has been a project with lots of discussions, creativity, tensions and contradictions. The construction with an, maybe too ambitious, application related to a quite lean time plan and a construct that demanded lots of cooperation made this to a tricky project. Most of the participants have been dedicated and eager to discuss and learn from each other when they actually meet, but in the long periods in between the interactions have been small. That has caused a lot of frustration and has been a topic for discussion at every meeting, without making any real changes in behavior in the long run.

Many of the partners were in such a project for the first time, and although the learning ambitions of the partners were high the allocated time and administrative resources and skills were perceived as too low – which, combined with the

lack of experience, made the local project administration and the understanding of the application into a struggle for many of the participants, throughout the whole project. The unstable situation with the project manager, changing person four times and having a big workload, was affecting the process for the whole project. As a result of these obstacles some of the work has been delayed - but are in progress; such as the handbook and the plan for exploitation and sustainability.

The amount of dedicated expert teachers has increased throughout the project and the sharing of knowledge between the different countries will probably continue in other projects. This has been a much appreciated part of the project.

Despite all obstacles the steering committee meetings and also the sharing of knowledge meetings were perceived as inspiring and rewarding. The events were both, in their own size, successful. The project has most definitely been a learning process for the participants, and the events has provided a learning arena for lots of European teachers - but there are, in this writing moment, still some tasks to fulfill.

References

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Appendix 1

Culture of Enterprise and Creativity!

- *"The ECECC stands for Embedding a Culture of Enterprise and Creativity in the Curriculum"*

- This was the first difficulty! What are the definitions? How do we know, who is to decide? This is a problem even within the different countries. How to handle this challenge in the project, how much time to spend on it?

- But to define is not the goal – so what is the goal for the project?

The project goal: A recurrent European educational event

- *"The ECECC aims to promote creativity and entrepreneurial spirit within the school curriculum in Europe by giving teachers the opportunity to test different methods in a safe environment at a recurrent European educational event by using a non contextual dependent method i.e focus is on the effects in the classroom."*

- This *goal* for the project is so far the *method* to reach your own *personal goals*, which are more social and learning. What is realistic to do in the project?

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The social and learning goals are dependent on your cooperation:

- Quiet a high level of satisfaction at, and after, the meetings. An inspiring and positive social experience. But it sticks just for a short while, what happens when you are at home again?

- Frustration (from all?), of the slowness in the processes in between. You all need response from the others to make your own wp. Why is there a low level of responding?

Problems with the continuity:

- The partner consortium behind the ECECC project is:
  The Municipality of Söderhamn, Sweden (project owner)
  The University of Gävle, Sweden
  The Municipality of Cremona, Italy
  Fondazione Luigi Clerici, Italy
  University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom
  Association of Local Authorities of Lääne-Viru County, Estonia
  FIDES POPULI s.r.o, Czech Rebulic

- You haven´t even once met all of you at the same place
- Lack of continuity even within the countries, project owner the worst
- Late coming - early leaving, hinders the process of becoming a team
- A lack of expert teachers för the SOK

Possible explanations?

- Unclear conditions from the start? Concept, responsibility, goals, prerequisites?
- Discontinuity of project owner?
- Lack of focus from the partners?
- Barriers? language, culture, education?
- Shyness? because of the language, spread in background, different cultures?
- Unrealistic goals? In the project, from the partners?
- Other?

Problems with communication and delivery

- Email, low level of chitchatting and answering of questions
- Long delay in delivery of workpages and good examples
- My role: Hard to be a critical friend when nobody wants to talk to me …