



EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Ruta Budinaviene

The teacher of artistic education, music teacher – expert of Klaipeda kindergarten „Volungele”

Rima Rupsiene

The before school education teacher, teacher – methodologist of Klaipeda kindergarten „Volungele”

It is not common for pre-school institutions to win the international Comenius competitions. In 2005 four of such schools, two of which were Klaipeda kindergarten “Volungele” and Siauliai district kindergarten “Buratinas” had each won even two different projects.

Main problem, which pre-school institutions face in participating in international competitions is the necessity to correspond and communicate with partners in foreign languages, other than Russian. Schools do not encounter such problems since they have specialist of English and German languages. However, if a pre-school institution has a pedagogue who is good at foreign language, it should participate in such competitions because they help gaining new experience, encourage pedagogues to remember foreign languages, enrich their communication, presentation planning, problem solving and other skills, provide a possibility to travel to other European countries, familiarise with their education system, educational methods and share their experience. Only one “minus” could be mentioned – a lot is done off work.

Hence, two Comenius projects were initiated in Klaipeda kindergarten “Volungele” in 2005 – Comenius 1.1. school project “Knowing me, knowing You” and Comenius 1.3. school development project “Improvement of reading skills”. These are the first international projects won by pre-school institutions in Klaipeda. We would like to encourage other pre-school institutions to participate in such competitions. Maybe our experience will help you decide.

Purpose of International Comenius projects

Purposes of school and school development projects are different. The purpose of school projects Comenius 1.1. is the implementation of new educational and learning methods by promoting the cooperation of students and teachers of different European countries. This cooperation provides a possibility to introduce others our country, culture, lifestyle, to familiarise

with, understand and learn how to tolerate cultures of other countries. Such activity ought to be integrated into educational programs and plans.

The purpose of school development projects Comenius 1.3. is to improve school management and teaching methods by promoting the exchange of good practice between European schools. School development projects are orientated to the needs of participating schools as educational institutions. The teams create new effective ways and methods to satisfy their needs and solve arising problems by invoking their own experience. Therefore they have a possibility to test and implement the most effective organizational and pedagogic discipline and methods.

International Comenius 1 projects can be organised for the period of one or three years, however in order to receive a subsidy you need to win the competition every year. For more information on the project visit the following website – <http://www.socrates.lt>.

First year of school project “Knowing me, knowing You”

We have waited for the result of the competition for about 6 months. The first thing we done after finding out that we have won was the assembly of a team. We found out that we should know more about accountancy. The plan for the first year was for pedagogues, children and parents to exchange information on folk tales, celebrations, and poems with their foreign partners, enrich their knowledge and understanding on culture and traditions of European countries, children work will be captured on film, photographs, they will write books, which will be sent to partner schools, educators will improve their foreign languages. We have analysed different tasks, planned further assignments, divided roles and, what is very important, analysed the financial aspects of the contract.

The main subject of the first year – *the variety of tale-telling methods*. Pre-school institutions from England, Spain, Germany and Lithuania had participated in the project. How can we interest other educators? What can we learn from them?

Each member of the project familiarised other members, in English, with two or more chosen ways of story telling and the interpretation and methodology of Charles Perrault’s “Cinderella”.

Our institution had presented Lithuanian fairy tales like “Katinelis ir gaidelis” (“Kitten and the rooster”), “Ozkele, puse lupata, puse skusta” (“Goat, half peeled, half shaven”), “Lukosiukas”, “Jonukas avinukas ir jo sesute Elenyte” (Jonukas the sheep and his sister Elenyte), “Meskos trobele” (“Bear’s hut”), and, as we mentioned, the methods of delivering children Charles Perrault’s

“Cinderella”, necessary actions, creative process and photographs of children emotions, films with their performances, their cultural expressions (following the “footsteps” of children activity).

Stages of creation of fairytales used in the projects:

1. **Acquaintance with the most beautiful Lithuanian fairytales.** Reading, telling, retelling the selected texts, deepens the understanding of fairytales, their plot, structure, mood, etc. Children chose their favourite stories.

2. **Deepening and development of available information.** Words, less known to children, are discussed, pictures of unknown things shown. Children themselves illustrate the fairytales by choosing story lines (for example, one story line – “The fox is running, constantly looking behind, to see if the fearsome creature, which took over her home, is pursuing her. And she meets the bear“). The illustrations are reviewed and everybody shares their impressions. Children who are familiar with letters can write down the name of the fairytale, copy a short text, names of characters, describe their drawings, etc.

3. **Formation of skills of impellent story telling.** The fairytale is retold by using drawings (for example, each child presents his drawing and recites what part of fairytale his drawing represents). After that the drawings are placed together by keeping the correct story line of the tale. A “television set” is made out of cardboard or shoe box, i.e. a screen is being cut out, with small incisions made in his sides through which a drawing “movie” is pulled. The story is retold successively or by parts, by remembering the characters and their natures. Other way – scenic improvisations of the educators during the process of story telling. This encourages children to listen more intently, stimulate their imagination and perception. The reading is done impellent as if identifying oneself with the story characters. Another way – use the actual surrounding things or their symbolic substitutes when telling the story.

4. **Making of puppets.** In pre-school institutions adults usually make the puppets: pedagogues or parents. Fairytale characters are made of various materials: straw, willow twigs, knitted gloves, or socks, fabric patches, hard paper (shadow theatre) and other materials. Bright colours are very important for the smallest children. Each fairytale requires specific puppets (e.g. only knitted puppets, or the ones used on hands) and decorations: paper decorations for paper puppets, fabric – for knitted, straw or wreathed willow twigs – for straw puppets. If the puppets are colourful, have many moving parts the decorations ought to be peaceful, plain, however if the puppets are static (e.g. on sticks, straw, or made for shadow theatre) and whole-coloured the decorations should be more complex, and hold more details, so children would be interested.

5. **Fairytale performance.** The fairytales are performed by selecting characters. By using voice intonation, movement children try to recreate the plot, mood, and character peculiarities of the

tale. Theatrical games and all related activities encourage children to communicate. It is important to perform the fairytales in a form of a game because it provides a possibility to create. Gradually children, as story characters, develop minimal histrionic skills and gain scenic experience. At first the tale is performed in front of friends and after a certain period of time – parents. An educator, always ready to help children, participates in each act. The costumes of actors (if seen by the audience) are discussed in advance and should not be of bright colours. Performances in front of the audience help children gain new social communication experience, accustom them to unconstrained and creative interaction in public situations, and reveal the pleasure of such activity.

6. Creation of fairytales. The fairytale is told by changing the plot, presenting new characters, playing. Maybe children are aware of a different ending and willing to tell it? Or maybe they will come up with a happy ending themselves? While telling the story one can “accidentally” mix or replace characters from different stories, change the place of action (e.g. top replace a wood with grandmother’s yard along with its residents), extend the plot of the story (e.g. philosophise on what will happen to the characters after their happy ending, or what would they do if they appeared in the kindergarten or another fairytale). During the process of fairytale creation the characters could be given a song or children could write a song themselves and apply a certain melody to constantly repeating phrases. Maybe the little ones, while still unable to read, would start imitating reading and create their own tale. Let them create, fantasize and perform.

The four-year-olds tried to perform a Lithuanian fairytale “Katinelis ir gaidelis” (“Kitten and the rooster”) using glove puppets. Lithuanian tale “Ozkele, puse lupata, puse skusta” (“Goat, half peeled, half shaven”), written with vocal insertions, was performed using puppets made of twig brooms. Animal characters of the story were created by binding branches in various ways; their ears, faces, and heads were shaped and puppet-carriers set. Ancient mortar was used instead of a cave.



The puppets from brooms to traditional national tale „ Goat, half peeled, half shaven”.

A scary tale “Lukosiukas”, as decided by the five-year-olds and their supervisor, was performed behind a screen with puppets on sticks. The puppets were made from cork material, and painted with acrylic paint.

Stories “Jonukas avinukas ir jo sesute Elenyte” (“Jonukas the sheep and his sister Elenyte”), “Meskos trobele” (“Bear’s hut”) were put on stage by using shadow theatre. These and previous stories were performed in front of parents, friends, school community during Autumn and Advent celebrations. Children really enjoy telling stories in **shadow theatre**. They choose fairytales with their educators and prepare puppets. This type of theatre is very suitable for children experiencing stage fright, because they feel better while performing behind the screen. Children that are more active and feel no fear give characters their voices.

While preparing for shadow theatre one must consider whether the room ought to be darkened (e.g. with the help of blinds, piece of fabric). Dark part of the day provides best conditions for such performances. The screen is made of white material with breadth of 0,5 – 1 m and length of 1 – 1,3 m, which is tightly pulled on a frame. A certain window could be applied or a screen stand used. One will need a movable illuminator or a viewer, however the grapho-projector is the most suitable since its light flow is adjustable. Screen effects are advisable (for example, to place a transparent coloured slide, creasy oil-paper, a scenery made from paper, an opaque paper with windows, etc on the glass surface of the grapho-projector, and replace them, if necessary, during the story telling). The wires of illumination equipment ought to be sellotaped to the ground so children would not stumble over them.

A fairytale is selected (“Sigute”, “Lino muka”, “Dangus griuva”, “Vistyte ir gaidelis”, “Pagrandukas”, “Ozkele, puse lupta, puse skusta”) puppets and decorations are made. Characters are cut out of cardboard. Legs, arms, wings and tails of some characters can be movable. They are cut separately and attached with special pins or buttons sewed on each side.

Carriers (for example flexible wire, wooden broaches, Chinese chop sticks, umbrella rods) are attached to the opposite side of the clippings (seen only by performers) with a tape; pieces of coloured silk cloth are attached (eyes, braids, heart, flowers, leaves, fire, shutters). A separate carrier is attached to each parts sewed apart.

It is better to use a piece of cloth attached to a stick or a hand for creation of some characters, especially the “naughty” ones (for example, the devil, bugaboo, wolf).

The decorations are prepared from ordinary or coloured transparent paper, fabric. Even desiccated flowers can be used as decorations. The blossoms of yarrow make very nice snowflakes. They are clipped to the opposite side of the screen. And everything is set for the play.

The phase of story performance and voicing begins. Children experiment with various items and their shadows, listen to the story and learn how to retell it in their own words, control the puppets, dialogues of characters – phrases and manners typical to them. Usually the actors perform silently and storytellers sit broadside to the audience and the screen. The audience can also act – they can be a musical background for fairytale characters.



Scene from shadow tale „Jonukas the sheep and his sister Elenyte”



The acting of national Lithuanian tale „Bear’s hut”

Reading methods of Charles Perrault’s “Cinderella”

1. FAMILIARISATION WITH THE FAIRYTALE.

Means: Book

The fairytale is read to the children. When the story is read for the first children only listen. When it is read for the second time the little ones observe the illustrations, discuss whether the story is already known, where did they hear it, who read it before. They analyse the events, characters and their nature of the story; educators explain difficult words.

2. DRAWING OF THE FAIRYTALE (ILLUSTRATION).

Means: gouache, paintbrush, paper (wallpaper).

Every child chooses part of the fairytale he liked best and draws it. Then they tell their friends what they painted, why they selected that particular episode and character. Children can even write down the names of the characters.



3. PAGEANT OF THE FAIRYTALE.

Means: veils, cloaks, crowns, dresses, magic wands, brooms, shoes. Additional means: music.

Children chose the role they desired, suitable costumes and necessary means from the group and home environments. The educator describes the circumstances of the story in accordance to which the children should perform. Children easily pageant the tale, create their own dialogs, plot and sequence. The story is divided. The educator gives no advice, since it restrains their creative expression and do not stop children if they digress from the plot of the tale and interpret it. Music is used for the prince's ball scene.

4. COOPERATION WITH PARENTS.

Invitation to participate in the carriage show is displayed in the group's information stand.

Parents are suggested to create a carriage for a Cinderella together with their children on a weekend.

The carriages are exhibited so everyone could admire interesting craftwork.



Colleagues from Usingen (Germany) were introduced to creation stages and performance of Brothers Grimm tale “The Bremen Town Musicians”.

The puppets (donkey, dog, rooster and cat) were made from balloons using the following method:

- Balloons of various sizes are prepared and moulded with newspapers and white paper soaked with paste (starch, PVA glue and flour);
- All this is desiccated;
- Other paper parts are glued (eyes, legs, tail, etc.);
- All parts are painted;
- Carriers are sewed down to the head and tail;
- Play decorations are painted on the windows.

A fairytale “Three Piglets” helped educators from Aracena (Spain) develop children cognition competency. After the story was read children were offered to paint pictures copied from colouring books and fill two sheets of paper: to write down a name of a portrayed animal (wolf, piglet) on one side, read a question and select the correct answer (to choose from several written or drawn variants) on the other, for example: *the body of the animal is covered by* (fur, feathers, skin, scales); *he lives in (...), feeds on (...), his footprints are (...), etc.*

Other drawn tale of Spanish children “Gaidelis Giedorelis” (“Rooster the Singer”) was presented with greater variety:

- The drawings are pulled out one by one out of cardboard box through special cut (as playing the game “Television”);
- A locomotive and wagons are cut from hard paper and connected, then windows, that can be opened, are made, and miniature drawings of children are placed;
- Children describe what is portrayed and pedagogues clip the descriptions together following a certain sequence.

Colleagues from Headington (England) introduced the methods of telling of the story “Three Goatlings”: after reading a story and after children had learned typical text repetitions (for example, text, songs or phrases constantly repeated by the characters) an offer to play with puppets was made.

First year of school development project “Improvement of reading skills”

The main purpose of “Improvement of reading skills” project is to overcome the reading problems. Reading is an important aspect of children education. If child’s reading and writing skills do not correspond with the requirements typical to their age they might encounter learning difficulties. Certain actions ought to be taken by teachers and family members in order to avoid such problems. Such problems are influenced by many reasons and can be solved by everyday efforts and work at school. During the implementation of this project many efforts were made in order to find more ways promoting the development of children reading and writing skills. Participants of this project are schools from Scotland, Mallorca and Turkey.

At first we have defined problems common to all schools and set the following goals:

Promote the interest in fairytales, stories and tales (motivation to read).

Encourage writing down of the known or created stories by using symbols and drawing.

Provide parents the educational help so they would get involved into common activities and be able to teach their children how to read and write.

Support the desire of parents and grandparents to create and read tales together with their children.

Strive for quality activity while going through the stages of the project.

Integrate the project activity into the school or group practices.

Every school had planned and executed its own activities. The achievements and problems could were discussed in an Internet forum created by the coordinating school in Mallorca. It became clear that in order to properly participate in the project our institution would have to equip with additional technical implements. We acquired new software, digital video camera, datival camera, document binding device and other equipment. We had to learn how to operate programs like *Power Point, Picture Package*.

Educators from Canakkale (Turkey) and our institution tried to define whether parents’ efforts to interest their children in such activities have any influence on the quality of their reading skills. We have prepared a questionnaire for parents. The results in both schools were similar. Hereby we provide the conclusions of our educators made with reference to questionnaire data.

1. Childs interest in reading and his reading achievements as well as the efforts of family members to arise his interest are closely related. The achievements are much better once family members try to engage children in reading.

2. Reading achievements of the child are influenced by reading and telling of fairytales. The following prerequisite was made with regard to questionnaire results – the interest in reading activities is rather vague if fairytales are read only once a month.

3. Parents who read stories to their children rather seldom were not able to tell which tale is their child's favourite.

4. However, the majority of parents still read fairytales to their children. According to 23% of the respondents the tradition of story telling and interpretation is still quite popular.

The educators had prepared a consecutive plan of project implementation. Uppermost they familiarised parents with the goals, tasks and intended activity of the project and promoted parents to participate in order to develop the reading skills of children. Each family was offered to choose a folk tale, read it with the child, engage him to go through the book and listen as it was read. After that they should create a book about the selected tale, with illustrations and comments, encourage children to show interest in written texts, develop ability to imitate, comment the writing and its elements, read and comment illustrations. Educators gave such proposals for creation of the story book: the child is drawing, telling his chosen story, the older members of the family writes it down and offers him to copy. The drawings, notations of children and adults, copies of children works are bind in accordance to the model of a book.

The parents from our institution were very actively involved. And that was a major achievement. We had received a number of books created using various techniques and methods. Every child was not only happy about his own book but showed interest in works of other children. Younger children and their parents had a possibility to enjoy the exhibition of the collected work.

Unfortunately not all participants could rejoice on such achievements. During the first year of project implementation parents from involved schools were rather reluctant to participate since, as we believe, in comparison to parents of pre-school institutions, they expressed less interest in the development of reading achievements of their children.

Families used different methods in order to engage their children in fairytales. This came to our knowledge after the presentation of created books when parents were asked how they have chosen the story, how they deliver it to the child (was it read or told), why did their child choose that particular tale, how they distributed work during the creation of the book and who was the initiator, what did the child do, what did the parents do, etc. this is how Rokas and his parents created their family book (recorded by the educators):

“Rokas is not keen on fairytales since they lack action. He is not interested in them and never asks to read him any. When we were told that children from his group will participate in a project involving story-telling Rokas and his father went to the bookshop where he selected a tale

called “Katinelis ir gaidelis” (“Kitten and the Rooster”). Parents do not know why this book got his attention because it was neither colourful nor exceptional.

After coming home they turned off all the appliances that could disturb the reading of the story. It was read twice. Rokas was very attentive. Then he copied the cover of the book using watercolour. The father had written down the name of the book on a separate piece of paper and read aloud each letter. Rokas copied all words on the cover of his future book.

The rest of the book was made in one day. Therefore it got a bit boring at the end. Dad read the each letter aloud again and the boy painted illustrations and copied all the words.

Now Rokas tells all of his friends that he and his dad made a book. He goes through his book and demonstrates it to his group friends”.

Children activity spheres like communication, listening, writing and drawing were comprised in development of reading skills. In order for reading to become an integral part of educational process various methods on development of reading skills by using image, sound, from and motion were considered. Using the existing experience of children i.e. stories they known, we have planned on how to integrate it into artistic, musical, communicational and cognitive activities. More educators got involved in the project. Besides, each participating school tried to engage as many pedagogues as possible. For example, all pedagogues from Mallorca school had participated.

During the project implementation children were given the possibility to share their impressions on creating the book with the rest of the group and read the story itself. Children that were unable to read tried to retell the story using illustrations or invited their parents to help. However the majority attempted to read and express their thoughts themselves.

Next stage of the project involved the performance of the stories. The acquired abilities were useful in various celebrations where children had to improvise alone or with the help of their parents. The educators had a possibility to observe the project implementation process in schools of other countries. In Canakkale (Turkey) and Mallorca children performed their national folk tales.

Children participating in the project had not only improved their reading skills but also met children from other European countries, familiarised with their traditions and customs – tried to find the countries on the map, gathered information, painted flags. The flags weren’t very easy to draw: they had to use ferules, different colours and even a magnifier so children could see minute details. However, it was very pleasing to see our national attributes, information on our country and greetings in other countries.

The final meeting was held in Mallorca. Representatives of participating schools presented illustrated and preformed folk tales. All countries had pursued the same purpose by using different

methods. That was determined by school experience and educational systems so we all could learn from one another. To our opinion, we learnt how to develop reading skills by using new disciplines and methods. Project partners used various means of artistic expression while improving reading ability of children: acting, art, music. Possibilities of implementation of such means were introduced during the meetings. Communication by images, individual expression of feelings, experience, moods, and ideas had enhanced children's motivation to read. The difference between our institution and other participants was that their children learnt how read in second language – English, and our children – in Lithuanian. Participating countries followed such attitude while planning the project activity – development of reading skills and education is an incomposite process that should be integrated into child's overall activity.

One of the main stages of the projects was to familiarisation of the school's community with the process of the project. All members prepared special stands, arranged discussions with parents, children, school management, recorded the proceedings of the project, demonstrated slides and pictures. The most important thing was that folk tales offered by other schools involved were introduced and read by educators and children of all participating schools.

Impressions of pedagogues

Meeting participants and greeting them in Lithuania was a new experience for us. Cultural programs, technical equipment, methods of familiarisation with the institution, its practice, leisure activities of guests needed a very careful planning. This project helped in gaining new management and teamwork skills, provided a possibility to learn about constructive problem solutions.



With guests in Witch hill (Juodkrante)

One of the latest experiences was the perception of responsibility and all other duties that come with it. New responsibilities pressed the shoulders of both the management of the project and operating groups. Project coordinators received the biggest workload and responsibilities. They were in charge of the whole project process, results and finances; all members of operating group, administration and remaining team addressed them with various questions. They selected the operating group, supervised the project work, planned the reception of guests, gathered the community, planned the trips, and prepared reports. Members of operating group shared duties and responsibility, especially during the reception of guests. It was not easy to gather a devoted team, appreciating the pulse of the project activities in one year. People that were assigned on trip had more work. It is still rather difficult to persuade educators that such projects are not only intended for their trips.

During the project meetings all partners communicated in English, therefore without knowing it one can feel inferior able only to smile. Thus we are very happy that such projects stimulate our educators to learn English and continue to improve it.

Certain questions needed answering during the visit of our guests: why are there so many unoccupied and unsupervised small and juvenile children in your streets? Why are there so many blocks of flats that look alike and who live in them? Why are there so few men working in your and other schools? What are the wages of educators in your country? (This question is usually asked several times), etc.

Partners of the project had visited schools of our social partners: Klaipeda kindergarten “Azuoliukas” and “Puriena”, “Versme” secondary school, observed their practices. We are pleased that our guests were satisfied with the reception.

We were very surprised to see that high fences surrounded all foreign participating schools, the gates were locked and playgrounds very secured. That differs greatly from the yard of a pre-school institution in Lithuania, where they are mostly overrun by local teenagers and dogs, and the outdoor inventory is very old. Maybe you could tell us who could “buy this problem”?



Aracena (Spain). There is safe and pleasant to children



Usingen (Germany) kindergarten playground.

We were much excited to meet educators from other countries. They are very competent professionals. We were surprised by the attention and reception we received from district authorities of Mallorca (Spain), Giresun (Turkey), Usingen (Germany).



Historical place in Mallorca

The trip gave us many new ideas: how the school environment could be handled, stands and children works shaped, how children could be originally introduced with the help of a board, what means should be used in groups, sports halls, corridors and so on. For example:

- When children are prepared for release to school a few colourful paper balloons (made form papier mache, the technique was described earlier) are hanged on the ceiling with a box to each “traveller” underneath them, i.e. children pictures clipped on the edges of boxes.



- Many white palm prints with black outlines are placed on a bright poster, symbolising doves: the thumb is a head of a bird, the little finger – a tail, and the rest of the fingers – bird's wings. Likewise educators place a lot of white paper birds all over the poster.



- The group is decorated like this – a paper, stripy hive with bees is strung up on a dry wine branch: a cardboard roll from toilet paper decorated with black strips and black paper antennas, yellow ribbon or flexible paper used to make wings.



- An upholstered room is mounted – it is a small room full of soft objects so no one would get hurt (pillows, toys, balls, carpets, wall decoration elements), with a hanging trainer (swings, made of big soft pillow). This room is intended for agile and hyperactive children to have a fling.



Many ideas were captured in photographs, and it is very difficult to place them in one article.

The project is not only about work. It is also travels across the country, informal interactions with colleagues, tasting of national dishes, and festive performances of children. The advantage of such educational trips is a possibility to get acquainted with the real life of a country and not the one that is intended for tourists.



In Spain with children, dressing up national costumes



We are taste traditional dishes in Giresun (Turkey)

By granting subsidies for travels and accommodation the Socrates Fund provides educators, receiving a rather small wage, a possibility to travel across Europe. We invite educators of all pre-school institutions of Lithuania to embrace such a wonderful opportunity.

"EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS". Participation of preschool institutions in realizing international competitions enables to acquire new experience, stimulates teachers to restore foreign language knowledge, enriches communication, organization of presentations, problem solving and other skills, offers a possibility, by means of a subsidy, to travel along European countries, to get acquainted with educational systems of other countries and their teaching methods, to share experience.

Straipsnio autorės R.BUDINAVIČIENĖ, R.RUPŠIENĖ. Ikimokyklinių įstaigų dalyvavimas įgyvendinant tarptautinius konkursus padeda įgyti naujos patirties, pedagogus skatina prisiminti užsienio kalbų žinias, turtina bendravimo, pristatymų organizavimo, problemų sprendimo ir kt. įgūdžius, suteikia galimybę, gavus subsidiją, pakeliauti po Europos šalis, susipažinti su tų šalių švietimo sistemomis, mokymo metodais bei pasidalyti patirtimi.