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**Europe in the classroom**

**Comenius Projects in Music Education - A Pool of Topics and Ideas in the Field of Music**

This article introduces the component Comenius in the Socrates programme of the European Commission, that since 2007 has been known as the Lifelong Learning Programme as an opportunity for forming networks in school education in Europe. It describes a compiled database of every Comenius project in the field of music and analyses the results of the examinations of experience gained from music projects.

The Comenius Programme: Goals, Priority Areas and Programme Types

The Comenius Programme is a funding programme that supports school education. It is a part of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission. The programme focuses on the first phase of education, from preschool and primary to secondary school and it is relevant for all members of the education community: pupils, teachers, local authorities, parents' associations, non-government organisations, teacher training institutes, universities and all other educational staff. „Comenius seeks to develop knowledge and understanding among young people and educational staff of the diversity of European cultures, languages and values. It helps young people acquire the basic life skills and competences necessary for their personal development, for future employment and for active citizenship.“

([ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84_en.htm)) With priorities being set annually the programme addresses issues are strongly related to current discussions and developments in European school policies. Several different project types were offered during the last decades. The most important project types are:

- Comenius School Partnerships (until 2007 known as Comenius 1 Projects): several schools in various countries work together on a selected topic.
- Comenius Regio Partnerships are bilateral projects involving local or regional school authorities.
- Multilateral Comenius Projects (until 2007 known als Comenius 2 Projects) are projects for the dissemination of learning concepts that involve several countries.
- Comenus Individual Mobility promotes participation in Comenius courses from multilateral projects or teaching assistantships.

- Comenius Networks (until 2007 known als Comenius 3 Networks) are large-scale initiatives that link levels of a subject area with each other and achieve closer cooperation between a number of different countries in a particular area of school education.

These project types represent the general goals: it is intended to improve and increase both the mobility of pupils and educational staff in different European member states and to improve pedagogical approaches and school management as well as enhancing the quality and European dimension of teacher training. Language learning has to be supported as well as innovative ICT-based content, services and better teaching techniques and practices.

„The programme focuses on the following priority areas

- Motivation for learning and learning-to-learn skills
- Key competences: improving language learning; greater literacy; making science more attractive; supporting entrepreneurship; and reinforcing creativity and innovation
- Digital education content and services
- School management
- Addressing socio-economoc disadvantages and reducing early school leaving
- Participation in sports
- Teaching diverse groups of pupils
- Early and pre-primary learning“

([ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc84_en.htm))

### Comenius and the Music Education Network (meNet)

Music Education in Europe is characterised by a fascinating diversity of approaches to music and to the training of music teachers. Although this variety has to be seen as one of the most significant characteristics of European culture it nevertheless entails great challenges at a number of practical levels. Music education in Europe can therefore be analysed and described from a variety of different perspectives: one of these perspectives focuses on music projects within the Comenius programme.

The research group as a part of the Music Education network (meNet) undertook an investigation on Comenius projects in the thematic field of music education in order to make this knowledge available to a broader community. The results have been summarised in three parts: information both on finished Comenius projects and on current Comenius projects and an investigation of projects.

## I. The Collection of Music Projects

Teachers who take part in exchange programs return home with a host of new ideas. At the same time, teachers find it motivating to present their own ideas on education in another country. It is indispensable that the school head supports such exchanges, and this requires professional knowledge of project planning. For this reason the collection of information on individual projects also includes contact details with a view to securing the cooperation of experienced colleagues.

Detailed information is given for 90 finished projects and 21 current projects from 20 European countries at <http://www.menet.info>. Information is listed according to the country that was responsible for project coordination. It contains contact information of the project coordinator, a description of the project and its subject matters as well as information on the languages used in the project. The list of the finished projects also provides information on any published products of the projects like CDs, DVDs, printed media etc. This collection and ordered presentation does not only serve as a source of information but also of inspiration for the development of music curricula and teaching concepts in schools. Without any doubt it is remarkable, that 63 projects, which means more than two-thirds of all projects were or are coordinated by countries of Eastern Europe. Here Poland with 48 finished and four current project has the highest quantity of projects by far. Besides the many rather short descriptions that can be found, three projects that have reached some kind of a special quality status are described in detail.

## II. The Investigation of Comenius Projects

### Method of Research

Firstly quality criteria for Comenius projects had been formulated. Then a questionnaire has been sent out to the project coordinators. The return rate amounted to 73,3%. For examining

the projects the following methods have been used: Since the information available on the finished projects provided very little information regarding results, all project-coordinators received a questionnaire using elaborated quality criteria:

1. Existence of European dimensions
2. Number of participant partners
3. Integration of diverse school-oriented partners
4. Practice orientation
5. Interdisciplinary implementation
6. Open for participation of all students and teachers
7. Stimulated follow-up projects
8. Applicable end results

#### Analysis of Results

Interdisciplinary work is generally highly prized among Comenius projects. In association with projects geared towards foreign languages, music plays a special role. This seems especially obvious as communication within Europe requires open-mindedness towards learning other languages (if not indicated in the diagrams, the numbers refer to absolute numbers) (see figure 1).

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Figure 1: (multiple replies possible)

Combinations that include music and aspects of new technologies are less frequent in comparison. Following traditions, a close association with historical references also proves of value (occupying the third position among interdisciplinary aspects). What is especially noticeable, however, is that physical education is hardly present in any of the projects. A distinctly different image is revealed when looking at the question in what form music was integrated into the projects (see figure 2): dance is in first place by a considerable margin. Thus, it seems that in East European countries, dance is understood as a special form of movement to music and not as part of physical education. The outstanding position of dance could be related to the fact that up to a certain degree dancing can be taught/ learnt without differentiated language knowledge by using body language while language as a communicator is indispensable when it comes to dealing with literary forms for example. Further down the list, music interpretation precedes concert visits as well as the connection to dramatic forms. Inventing music and making elementary musical instruments are only seldom integrated in the projects.

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Figure 2 (multiple replies possible)

With regards to the publishing of the polled Comenius-projects, it is revealed that CD-ROM and DVD dominate the format in which the projects' results were published together with traditional printed media. The overall impression of publishing formats seems nonetheless balanced (compare figure 3). Among the electronic media, websites and the classic video are equally preferred. But exhibitions and performances also play a big role.

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Figure 3 (multiple replies possible)

The low number of Comenius 2 projects in the realm of music education explains the small amount of pedagogical materials being produced: Comenius 1 projects are usually student-oriented and do not aim at producing teaching resources.

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#### Figure 4

With regards to the results' publishing, the importance of a local connection becomes most obvious (see figure 4). Almost two-thirds of all project publications are confined to a local and national level only. Merely a few projects have published their results in an international or European context.

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Figure 5 (multiple replies possible)

This figure (figure 5) largely mirrors figure 3. Publishing the results “in person”, can often be equalled to having a performance as a final product of a project. In many projects, these were at the same time documented by audio-visual means (DVD, video). It is striking that publishing the results in a personal form can be put on a level with a performance as a result. The relatively important role printed media still play is striking.

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#### Figure 6

The majority of projects seem to assume that their results are being disseminated among a small target-group (see figure 6). The highest target-group indication states less than 100. Almost half of the projects (49%) have presented their results to less than 250 visitors or have published an according amount of their results.

On the other side, there seem to be projects that reach wide target audiences with more than 1,000 copies/ visitors.

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Figure 7

This chart speaks for itself: Almost all participants are satisfied with their project's results. Almost 50% judge their results as "very good", no project partner was very dissatisfied with the results (see figure 7).

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Figure 8

More than three-quarter of respondents confirmed that partners stay in contact after the project is completed (figure 8). With regards to sustainability, Comenius projects thus seem to

be a valuable contribution to the European educational system.

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Figure 9

Even though a few participants were dissatisfied with the project partners' cooperation (figure 9), a very positive evaluation prevails when asked about the cooperation. More than half of the respondents (51%) declare that the cooperation was “very good”.

The following figures 10 and 11 are being combined:

Although figure 8 reveals that more than three-quarter of the former project partners keep in contact beyond the project, the impression inverses when it comes to initiating follow-up projects. Less than one quarter of projects was continued in a follow-up project. Also, when follow-up projects are being put in place, they usually involve new project-partners.

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Figure 10

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Figure 11

Answers to the query: If possible, please specify some highlights for the teachers involved in the project.

	Number of Mentions
Getting to know a new pedagogical system	12
Getting to know other teachers	9
Getting to know different European countries	6
Exchanging good pedagogical ideas abroad	4
Improving language skills	4
Building friendships	3
Getting new ideas and inspiration from other teachers	2
Teachers are sad that it is over	1
Opportunity to see the students' genuine joy and show them other cultures	1
Visiting partner schools and other schools in partner countries	2
Seeing the students' and parents' enthusiasm in participating	1
Motivation to learn the foreign language	1
Incorporating more musical activities into the curriculum	1
English language class	1
Improving IT abilities	1
Satisfaction of "doing something beyond teaching"	1
Learning a lot about the education and therapy of the disabled in the partner country	1
Strengthening the school staff	1
Improving professional skills	1
Folklore as an addition to highly vocational school knowledge	1
Recognizing the co-workers' lifestyles and project partner's way of working	1
Successfully recording a CD with a trilingual songbook, creating video footage and photo documentation	1
Exchange of experiences	1
Establishing communication	1
Establishing reciprocal relations between teachers and students on a high quality level	1

Table 1

From the teachers' perspective, two aspects are most significant in the projects: the subject-content related aspect and the personal aspect. It is important for the teachers to get to know different pedagogical systems and ideas. They also wish to strengthen their personal competences and to widen their personal realms of experience.

Answers to the query: If possible, please specify some highlights for the students involved in the project.

	Number of mentions
Learning about other cultures	10
Getting to know other adolescents	9
Improving English language skills	9
Gaining an insight into different school systems	4
Establishing friendships	4
Motivation to learn English	2
Growing as a student and person by taking the responsibility of representing the school	2
Holding a presentation in front of others	2
Celebrating the end of the project with dancing, singing, acting	1
Improving self-confidence	1
Establishing (e-mail) contacts between students	1
Establishing reciprocal relations between teachers and students on a high-quality level	1
Participating in creative activities	1
Very happy to invite guests in their houses	1
Holding an internet conference	1
Interest in being involved in the project	1
Students' artistic development	1
Knowing international folklore	1
Successfully producing a folk ensemble, cookery book, tourist eye-catcher, carpets, ...	1
Creating an amateur ensemble that successfully performed songs and consequently recorded them on CD; eloquent translations from Czech to Portuguese and English; first place in a Madeira carnival competition with an interview for Madeira television	1
Improving social competences	1
Gaining independence	1
Organising concerts, exhibitions, miscellanies – a financial donation enabled attractive forms of teaching, field trips, and travels	1
Involving students of all age groups	1

Table 2

The teachers do not name any increase in their students' competences that are music-immanent. Intercultural experiences are being named as an important learning target in different facets. Improving foreign language skills as well as general social competences are also being highlighted.

Answers to the query: If possible, please specify some highlights for the schools involved in the project.

	Number of mentions
Exchanging experiences between different school systems	5
Gaining a good reputation among other schools in the area as a developing school/ better image within the local community	5
Financial support	4
Through the project, students and teachers felt like they were an important part of the school	1
Developing the school	1
Creating activities involving pupils, teachers, parents and sometimes even the local community	1
Enhancing the quality of artistic performances	1
European first runs of musical news	1
Participating in an international meeting of three schools in Dolný Kubín (Slovak town, editor's note)	1
Exchanging intercultural experiences and traditions	1
Sharing pedagogical and methodical materials	1

Table 3

From the teachers' perspective, the value the schools derive by participating in a project does not lie in advancing or changing the subject teaching. Music classes do not play any role. It is rather about the school gaining profile, skimming financial resources, as well as getting to know different educational systems in the European context.

Answers to the query: Tell us about possible problems, frustrations, and / or disappointed expectations during or after the project.

	Number of mentions
Heavy workload for the individual – especially during spare time	5
Some problems with contacts via internet	3
Disappointment over non-approval for a follow-up project (explanation: You already received...)	2
Insufficient funding	2

Lack of support from other teachers/management in school	2
Problems fulfilling the planned tasks in time	2
One country (Turkey) did not get the money for the project	1
6 headmasters during the project – difficulties to really get them involved	1
Sometimes the teachers didn't get involved because of language barriers	1
One should preferably be an accountant to do the settlement	1
Expensive entry-fees in Prague	1
Miscellaneous organizational problems	1
Slow cooperation with the coordinator of the project	1
All the problems related to hosting groups of over 30 people	1
There were no workshops or meetings for the project coordinators	1
Partner schools did not seriously invest in the project	1
Expectations for more openness were not fulfilled	1
Initial problems with one partner, those were however later overcome	1
Expensive hotel in Slovakia	1
Breaching dead-lines, slow post service, time limitations	1
Absence of a school minibus in the Czech republic	1

Table 4

Organisational and communication difficulties make for the biggest share of occurring problems. The heavy time-investment required by a project as well as the financial aspects deragate projects. Linguistic problems exist, but only play a secondary role overall.

Further comments on the project

	Number of mentions
An interesting experience	4
Expanding the teachers' and students' horizon	2
Intercultural communication (great experience!!!)	2
Really inspiring for all participants	2
Worth doing	2
Students can become aware of the European identity	1
The project and the cooperation helped our school become a more European school open to new ideas and cultures	1
A lot of work, but the experience obtained is priceless	1
The project was awarded the EUROPEAN AWARD OF QUALITY/E – quality 2004 in Prague	1

This project counts among our best yet; especially thanks to the very kind, jolly and self-sacrificing Madeira people, both groups of students soon became friends and created great bonds that still last	1
Dancing turned out to be a great tool to overcome social and cultural barriers, especially during the first days of project activities	1
Fantastic experiences for teachers and students	1
The project helped the school in its focus	1
Improved cooperation between parents, music school, and operative staff	1

Table 5

Even though the projects are perceived as a challenge due to the workload, in the end the positive overall impression prevails – once again without a relation to music classes.

### Summary of Analysis

The description of completed projects shows the variety of possibilities that can be actualised directly or indirectly in the field of music education in an art-encompassing sense.

At first glance, it is extremely striking that teachers name hardly any music-immanent subject areas among the highlights for the participating students. “Students’ artistic development” or “Participating in creative activities” are only mentioned once each. Improving language skills, getting to know other cultures and their representatives or different school systems seem to be considered a lot more important. Only once is “knowing the international folklore” mentioned, although it is not clear if this statement alludes to musical folklore.

Thus, the completed projects reflect the Comenius programme idea very well: the knowledge and understanding of the diversity of European cultures, languages, and values are constantly at the centre of attention. The projects help both students and teachers equally with acquiring elementary skills and competences for their personality development.

Many participants regret that it is difficult to initiate follow-up projects as a result of the application modalities. They also criticise the inadequately high formal and bureaucratic obstacles involved in the projects’ application and realisation processes: they wish for an adequate manageability of the projects.

Deducting from the project results, both the choice of subject and the performance of many projects make clear how closely music education in schools and music teacher education are related: For the teachers, the continuing education or lifelong learning aspect plays a big role. Tying the Comenius programme’s basic ideas in offers manifold possibilities from a musical perspective: It is equally attractive for students, teachers and the school as an institution and it

provides all participants with references for the development of competences in terms of lifelong learning.

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