



EDITORS NOTE: This article on the COMENIUS Multicultural was much too long to fit into one page which is the usual length of our monthly NEWSLETTER. However because it was so interesting and well written we have decided to expand the INEPS Newsletter. We hope that the content overrides any technical inconvenience that you might have downloading.

“Come Here - Compare” The Second Multicultural Exchange Among German, Swedish and Spanish Students Held In Berlin

All students worked a lot before the second meeting in our COMENIUS exchange program “Come Here - Compare”. We all wanted to show our partner schools something about our hometowns and about our history. That had to be prepared. In English. Hard work for most of us.

We knew many of the students involved in the exchange program from our first meeting in Stockholm. There we made the first shy steps towards each other. We had the first talks to students from the other countries. Often we needed our hands and feet to communicate. We got the first impressions about how life in Sweden and Spain is like. But we did not get very close to each other - because of many reasons. This time we - the German group - were responsible for the program. And we wanted to make it a success. We wanted to get into contact, to learn a lot from each other. We wanted to have fun together and to work together. And we wanted to present our school and our city in as good as light as possible.

Therefore we started early with our planning. Both sides, teachers and students, were involved. Most steps we took - apart from some “surprises” - were e mailed to the other two groups via our website. So they knew what they had to expect. We had planned that we German students go together with an exchange student to a practical placement for two days so that they can experience what we are doing and how the Germans work. We published the practical placements on our website and the Spanish and Swedish students could choose a place of their interest.

We used the English classes in school to prepare the introduction of our city and its history, to learn vocabulary about our work etc.



The German Group. About half of the students and all teachers in our project “Productive Learning” participated in the exchange program in Berlin.



Olga from Moscow arrived. She is writing a book about Productive Learning and wants to deal with our Comenius project in one chapter. She accompanied the first meeting in Stockholm and now wanted to see how it goes on and how things develop. She has a critical eye on everything and that helps to see things clearer.

Then it was the 19th of May, the day when our friends from Vilafranca del Penedès and from Stockholm should arrive. In the morning we met in school to organize the last things. Then some of the students and the responsible teacher, Egbert Jahn, went to the underground station in “Schönhauser Allee”, where we waited to welcome our friends. We had explained to the groups the way from the airport to our meeting point. From the underground station it was only a five minutes walk to the hostel. Both groups stayed in one hostel. That made it easier to meet later on and to make appointments. After everybody got a key we gave them a map to find the way to our next meeting and a rest for about 2 hours.

Then we met for the "Welcome Party". Over a BBQ and some (soft)drinks we got into contact. We had prepared some things to break the ice. First every guest got a bag with some information about Berlin, a map, some sweets and a T-shirt with the logo of our Comenius project. The Spanish got a red shirt, the Swedish a blue one. Both colors are in their national flags. The Germans had a yellow shirt - the linking color which is in all three national flags.

In the right corner there was space for everybody's name. so it was easy to remember the names and the nationality.



In addition to that we had prepared a kind of "business card" for every guest student. On it were a number of important addresses and telephone numbers (hotel, teachers, school...) and the place where the students would meet next morning to go to work together. After each German student had found the guest student with whom he/she would work the next days they talked to each other. The Germans explained how to get to the meeting point (or decided to pick them up at the hotel because it would be too difficult for them) and we also told them if they had to wear special clothes etc.

Next morning the students all met at different times. Some had to get up quite early (e.g. at five o'clock) to be on time at the meeting point, even before breakfast was served. But we had prepared a breakfast-packet for each of them. So nobody had to starve. Then they went to their practical placements. There was always one Berlin student with one student from Spain or Sweden. All in all in 16 different enterprises. By the way it was not difficult to organize the work. Each mentor we asked at our practical placements was happy to agree to us bringing a "foreign student" into the enterprise for two days. Often we heard words like: "That's great. I know a little Spanish. I wonder if they understand me." or "No problem. I speak English. At least I learned it at school. Good opportunity to give it a go again." or "Well, I don't speak English. But as long as you care for the student everything is fine."

Working together was fun. It was not always easy to communicate. It's difficult to speak all day in English. There were so many things which the students couldn't say because they didn't know the words. But they learned from each other. And they learned how important it is to learn a foreign language if you want to get into contact with people from other countries. An experience the students from all three countries learned - although the English of the Swedish students was very good.

At the practical placements the students were involved in "every day life" in the enterprises. They worked in restaurants, kindergarten, hair-dresser's, at the doctor's, on building sites etc. For the German students it is a part of their school. They learn in different practical placements for three days a week. At two days they are in school and learn the theoretical things they need at their placements. Now they could show their guests what they have learned. The students from Stockholm and Vilafranca learned how school and work in Germany is organized and could compare practical experiences they had made in their own countries to that.

Some pictures as examples of the different practical placements

Sandra (Sweden) in a Restaurant



Steven and Johan (Sweden) at a construction machine rental shop



Isabella (Sweden) and Susanne at the hairdresser's



Fulya and Osman (Sweden) at the doctor's



Jose and Francesc (both from Spain) at a retail trade

All in all they worked together for 6 hours every day. Most mentors gave the responsibility to the German students. Quite a big challenge since they had barely started work in the enterprises three weeks before. But they managed. They took over the responsibility. They showed them what to do, explained things, organized lunch for their guests and took care that they got safely back to their hotel (most of them brought them to the hotel) or even spent some time after work together and showed them Berlin or invited them for a cup of coffee (with mum and dad) at home.

Every afternoon at about four o'clock we all had a meeting in the courtyard of the hotel. There we discussed the day, talked about experiences the students had and made plans for the next day. Everybody had done well at work, managed to be in a place and with a student he/she didn't know before, was successful and proud. We talked about things which should be changed, noticed what went wrong and could react to make it better. It was a very relaxed atmosphere. The students looked very adult. No wonder, they had done a good job, showed responsibility, were reliable - no longer kids at all.



After the meeting there was free time. But that didn't mean that all German students went home and the Swedish and Spanish students went in groups on their own. They went into town together and made sightseeing on board of the famous Bus 100 that leads from Alexanderplatz (city east) to Bahnhof Zoo (city west) and passes a lot of interesting sights.

After two days of work experience we met in our school in Berlin Buch on Thursday the 22nd. The students from Vilafranca and from Stockholm wanted to tell us about their cities and their history. We all live in very different countries and cities. Each of them have an interesting history. The cities had all experienced war and torture at one time or another. Each city had different aspects, had a long time of well being or e.g. or fighting together with the region for independence. Things which most of the students from the other countries did not know. But only if you know about history can you understand the present.



The presentations were a big success. The students were pretty nervous because they had to act like teachers now. Everybody had arranged a part for the presentation and told the others with the help of "Power Point" what they had prepared. For some of the students it was quite difficult as everything was in English. It is very difficult to make a speech in a language which you don't speak fluently. But they managed. Each of them did. And it was interesting. Within two hours we learned a lot about our European past. We learned something about the outcome of the Second World War and its' results until now. And we could compare the situations in the cities today. One city with a suppressed background, one city with a liberal background and formally divided city. Life had developed differently and we learned about the reasons for that. Some of the Swedish students even began a hypothetical moral discussion. They told us that we were on a sinking boat with only five seats in the lifeboat. Then they gave us a list of people who where on board. We had to decide which of them should be rescued. First in groups, then together. A difficult task. Even more difficult because it had to be discussed in English. But with the help of the teachers the students managed. They discussed, agreed and disagreed. In the end they found five persons. But not everybody was satisfied with the result. A good lesson in democracy. And what about the final result? Well, there is no right or wrong. It's only a question of moral values.



On the last day of the exchange it was our turn to present our city and its' history. Therefore we met at "Gesundbrunnen" to start a tour into the Berlin underground. We visited a bunker from the Second World War and got an impression about what war and living in a shelter meant and means. It was quite depressing to see the rooms, breathe the wet air and smell the odor of moldiness. And we saw bunkers that had been changed after the war into shelters for the case of an atomic explosion in times of the cold war. We realized how dangerous the situation in Berlin was and understood what that meant for the rest of Europe. Although the tour was only for two hours, it was an experience that none of us will forget easily.

After being back in the sun the students organized in small groups of four to six. Now the Berlin students wanted to present their city, to show historical places like the Brandenburg Gate, Holocaust Memorial, Reichstag and Alexanderplatz and to explain the history and the present. Together with the students they cared for at the practical placements they went into town. The offer that one of the teachers could accompany them (in case they had problems with the language) was not accepted. The students had prepared and felt confident. There was only one rule: all of them had to be back in the hotel at about 4.30 pm. The Swedish students had to pack as (unfortunately) their plane back home left that evening. But before leaving we all met in a youth club for the "Farewell Party". Here we had time to say good bye, exchange souvenirs and promise that we would meet again. The responsible teachers from all three countries and Olga from Moscow gave short speeches and then there was only a short time to have something to eat (we had prepared some sandwiches, quiches and soft drinks) before the Swedish had to leave. We all were very sad when it was time to say goodbye, first to the Swedish, later to the Spanish. During that week we became very good friends. The Swedish, the Spanish and the Germans. Distance and language did not really matter. We used the remaining time to play together, dance and have fun together. And when we left, we knew that we will stay in contact and that we will meet again. Next year in Spain or sometimes in-between during our holidays. Can there be a better result after only one week?



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