

# **Handbook on evaluation and dissemination strategies for Comenius 2 projects**

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## Introduction

The objectives of Comenius 2 are to enhance the quality of teaching and learning; to reinforce the European dimension of school education; to promote quality in the teaching of EU languages; and to promote intercultural awareness in school education in Europe.

Comenius 2 seeks to achieve these objectives by stimulating the professional development of all types of staff involved in school education; by encouraging training providers in different participating countries to work together; by broadening the supply of training opportunities in areas of particular interest in a European context; and by improving access to training opportunities in countries participating in the SOCRATES programme.

During the implementation of European educational development programmes like Comenius it has become more and more clear that *evaluation* and *dissemination* activities are important tools to improve the quality and the impact of project results and products. The application of both tools is not only important after completion of the project work but perhaps even more so during the development process. This means that evaluation and dissemination activities become integrated parts of a project, on an on-going continuous basis.

The European Commission aims at strengthening the quality and the impact of Comenius 2 projects by stimulating and valuing positively evaluation and dissemination activities.

To support project coordinators and participants in designing good evaluation and dissemination procedures and activities the Commission is making available this 'Handbook on evaluation and dissemination strategies for Comenius 2 projects'. The objective of the Handbook is not to provide the project coordinators and participants with fully fledged, detailed methodological approaches for evaluation and dissemination. Its aim, in brief, is to function as a guide, a reminder and an eye-opener for projects under Comenius 2, especially for those project coordinators and participants who have little or no experience in doing evaluation and dissemination work, and to make them aware of the range of options which exist.

The Handbook aims directly at improving the evaluation and dissemination of project processes, results and products. It does not cover the evaluation of the financial situation and progress of projects, although evaluation approaches that are described in this Handbook can also be used for monitoring and steering the finances of Comenius projects, thereby facilitating the management of these projects.

The Handbook consists of a menu of elements that can be used for evaluation and dissemination purposes. By selecting and, if desirable and suitable, mixing up selected elements, the coordinator and partners of a Comenius 2 project can at the outset design an evaluation and dissemination strategy which is especially suited for their specific project.



## Part A - Evaluation

### Introduction: a framework for evaluation strategies

The term “evaluation” refers to the whole process of planning, controlling and assessing the results of a project in a systematic manner. It involves the determination of project objectives and requirements, the continuous control of the project as it proceeds and the assessment of its results. Evaluation should be a repetitive, cyclical process that will lead to improvement of the project.

Ideally, at the very beginning of a Comenius project, the partners should develop their evaluation strategy. This handbook aims at drawing attention to evaluation in Comenius 2 projects by providing project coordinators and project partners with an understanding of the importance of evaluation in order to achieve good results.

A good evaluation strategy applied throughout the project will not only improve the quality of the project and facilitate its performance and management. It will also help in composing the interim and final report the project partners have to write.

To support the Comenius partnerships and projects with their evaluation strategies<sup>1</sup> a **framework** which provides an overview of all relevant elements, is presented in this introduction, consisting of 3 main parts:

- the ‘why’ and ‘when’ of evaluation as basic questions to be answered before one can determine how to operate;
- the question of ‘what’ to evaluate;
- the subsequent questions ‘how’ to evaluate and ‘who’ should evaluate.

With regard to the question ‘why?’ this handbook makes a distinction between *formative* and *summative* evaluation, whereas for the question ‘when?’ three concepts are presented: : *ex ante*, *on-going* and *ex post* evaluation. The meaning of these concepts will be explained in chapter 1.

Next the questions of ‘how?’ and ‘by whom?’ are dealt with in chapter 2 of this handbook. Because the handbook is particularly aimed at project partners who have no or little experience in carrying out systematic evaluation activities, these questions are treated prior to the question of ‘what has to be evaluated?’ This sequence enables one to directly accompany the elaboration of the question ‘what has to be evaluated?’ in chapter 3 with suggestions about ‘how?’ and ‘by whom?’ these evaluation activities could be carried out. With regard to the question ‘how?’, seven techniques are described: *project descriptions*, *minutes of meetings*, *group discussions*, *individual interviews*, *questionnaires*, *observations* and *tests*. All these can be applied by the project partners themselves in a *self-evaluation procedure* or by *external evaluators*. These seven techniques have been selected

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of evaluation that is used in this handbook is that of policy-, programme-, and project evaluation, which is different from a pure scientific evaluation using an experimental research design. Project evaluation can have two functions: firstly to objectively describe processes, products and situations, secondly to improve processes, products and situations and / or to investigate the feasibility of transferring the project idea to other contexts. Both functions are integrated in this handbook.

on the basis of theoretical knowledge, in combination with a study of documents on evaluation practices in Comenius projects and a well-founded insight in the character of Comenius projects. It is not an all-embracing overview of existing techniques. Chapter 2 provides a brief explanation of these techniques and of the merits of self-evaluation and external evaluation, complemented with application guidelines.

With a view to the question ‘what has to be evaluated?’ four dimensions have been distinguished. Regardless of the dimension at which the evaluation will be targeted, one or more evaluation questions have to be formulated which will strongly influence the selection of evaluation techniques. The four dimensions are:

- *evaluation of parts of the project process*, which is highly relevant when evaluation takes place on an on-going basis;  
Because this handbook has been developed to improve the evaluation of Comenius 2 projects, aspects of working in projects are the focal point for evaluation: the management and the structure of the project; its point of departure; the project aims; the ways to achieve these aims; feedback loops in the development phase; and pilots of the newly developed materials.
- *final evaluation of the project*, a task that needs to be carried out when the project has come to its end;
- *evaluation of the project’s impact*. Comenius projects are not promoted and subsidised for the sake of the project itself, but for encouraging innovations which have an impact on education at a wider scale;
- and *meta-evaluation*, in this handbook conceived as a critical review of the evaluation strategies applied in the project.

For each element of this part of the framework in chapter 3, a section is created with an explanation of the element, relevant guiding questions for evaluation purposes and an enumeration of evaluation techniques that can best be used.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 all have the same structure. Firstly a part of the framework is presented. Then an explanation is provided covering all aspects of that part of the framework. This should enable the reader to continuously interpret the things described against the background of the entire model which has been developed.

Every project can develop its own, unique evaluation strategy which is adapted to the needs of the project, by combining decisions on the five questions of the framework. An evaluation strategy, once developed, should be applied in a flexible rather than in a rigid way because of the developmental character of Comenius projects.



# Evaluation strategies: a conceptual framework

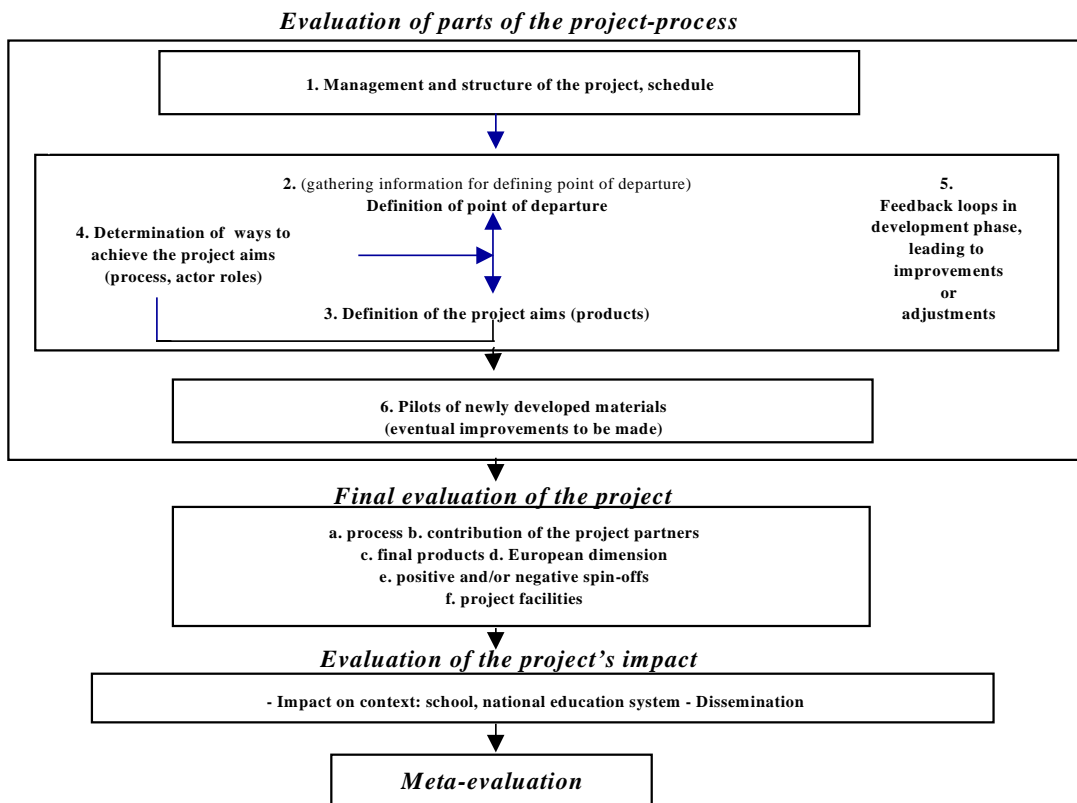
## 1. Evaluation: why and when?

Why	When	<i>Ex ante</i>	<i>On-going</i>	<i>Ex post</i>
<i>Formative</i>				
<i>Summative</i>				

## 2. Evaluation: how (evaluation techniques) and by whom?

How	By whom	<i>Self evaluation</i>	<i>External evaluation</i>
<i>Project descriptions - qualitative</i>			
<i>Minutes of meetings - qualitative</i>			
<i>Group discussions - qualitative</i>			
<i>Individual interviews - qualitative/quantitative</i>			
<i>Questionnaires - qualitative/quantitative</i>			
<i>Observations - qualitative/quantitative</i>			
<i>Tests - qualitative/quantitative</i>			

## 3. Evaluation: what (which aspects to be evaluated)?





# 1 Evaluation: why and when?

Conceptual framework part 1

Why	When	<i>Ex ante</i>	<i>On-going</i>	<i>Ex post</i>
<i>Formative</i>				
<i>Summative</i>				

Two types of evaluation can be distinguished with regard to the ‘why’ of evaluating Comenius 2 projects: *summative* and *formative* evaluation.

*Summative evaluation* refers to reviewing activities and results at the end of a project and often for an external ‘client’, e.g. for the sake of contractual accountability. And the decision to continue a project or not is also the result of summative evaluation. Often, also in Comenius projects, evaluations have been/ are confined to evaluation for the sake of contractual accountability, with a particular focus on cost-effectiveness.

*Formative evaluation* leads to understanding, to development, to project improvement during a project. Project improvements should be taken into account when one wants to improve the quality of the Comenius projects. Questions relevant for formative evaluation are: what works, what does not work, why (not), what can be done to proceed in a more productive or convenient way? The decision to refocus a project is the result of formative evaluation.

Formative evaluation is different from summative evaluation, not so much because of different qualitative or quantitative evaluation techniques (that can be applied for both), but because of its focus.

For the partners in Comenius 2 projects, the distinction between summative and formative evaluation is highly relevant, not for making a choice for either one of them, but for considering a fruitful combination of both to raise project quality and simultaneously improve project results and if necessary, the chances of project renewal.

The question of ‘when’ evaluation becomes relevant, is closely related to the statements made above. In evaluation theory three types of evaluation are distinguished: *ex ante* (in advance), *continuous* or *on-going* and *ex post* (afterwards).

A good combination of formative and summative evaluation asks definitely for an *on-going* (continuous) approach during the project.

A formal *ex ante* evaluation of a project proposal is done by the National Agency or the European Commission during the awarding process. Each project proposal requires comprehensively argued project aims and an acceptable degree of feasibility. Only when such a feasibility is guaranteed, the project partners, as well as the Commission, are willing to participate. Other *ex ante* evaluation activities seem to be less suited for Comenius 2 projects. One of the criteria project proposals should take into account is 'innovativeness'. This means that new directions have to be taken, the outcomes of which - as is always the case with new directions - cannot be (completely) predicted in advance.

One exemption to the rule, described above, concerns the product(s) or material(s) which have been developed in Comenius projects. Products or materials are supposed to have an impact on a sometimes very big, target group. Before taking the decision to really implement products or materials it can be very helpful to carry out an *ex ante* evaluation how to do this best. Such an evaluation will undoubtedly contribute to a well founded follow up of the project activities already carried out.

Relying solely on *ex post* evaluation is ineffective as a contribution to project improvement. It is also dangerous in case of a summative evaluation because harm that has been done during the process is sometimes difficult to repair at the end.

**Example: The organisation of formative on-going evaluation**

**Development of multi-national courses for school teachers who work with pupils with special education needs**

Member States involved: GB, NL, DE, GR

Each project activity has been evaluated by one of the partners who was responsible for writing an evaluation report. For this purpose the following standard set of criteria in the form of questions has been developed:

Were you clear about what you had to do before attending the activity? Were you satisfied with the ways of working used? Was the purpose of each session clear? Were you satisfied with the way the group was led/chaired? What were the successes of the activity from your perspective? How could the activity be improved? Any other issues you would like to raise?

A methodology for evaluating the courses, including the filling in of a questionnaire and the application of drama, was developed and revised as a result of its use on the first and second courses.

The evaluation made clear that the course as a whole was a success. It offered the opportunity to participants to share feelings, ideas and common problems with colleagues from other countries, eliminating in this way the feeling of isolation that teachers often experience in their everyday educational practice. According to the participants the course was 'quite an experience', 'a celebration of teachers', 'hard work but encouraging for a fresh start', and 'door opening because the whole of Europe was in the same room'.

## 2 Evaluation: how (techniques) and by whom?

Conceptual framework part 2

How	By whom	<i>Self- evaluation</i>	<i>External evaluation</i>
<i>Project descriptions</i> qualitative			
<i>Minutes of meetings</i> qualitative			
<i>Group discussions</i> qualitative			
<i>Individual interviews</i> qualitative/quantitative			
<i>Questionnaires</i> qualitative/quantitative			
<i>Observations</i> qualitative/quantitative			
<i>Tests</i> qualitative/quantitative			

In on-going and *ex post* evaluations specific qualitative and quantitative techniques can be used to collect the data which serve as a basis for the evaluation(s). The techniques can be applied by the project partners themselves as well as by external evaluators.

### 2.1 Techniques

#### 2.1.1 Project descriptions

A first way to evaluate a Comenius 2 project is by making a report which describes the development of the range of aspects / activities as mentioned in the project-proposal in order to assess whether or not the project can be / has been carried out as intended.

Questions relevant for evaluation purposes are presented in the following box 1.

## Box 1

### **Questions relevant for evaluation purposes**

- What went according to plan and did it go smoothly?
- What were the main reasons for this?
- Which elements of the project plan were difficult to attain?
- Why was this so?
- What alternative actions have been taken?
- Were these successful?
- Would you formulate the project proposal differently if you could have anticipated the experiences you have had?
- If yes, what would be the main differences?

Project descriptions can be very elaborate, but can also have a more condensed character. As a rule producing project descriptions is rather time consuming, but they tend to give the most comprehensive evaluation of a project.

A specific form which can be used for project descriptions is when one or more partners in the project keep a diary or a logbook.

Making project descriptions is recommended not only at the end of the project when the first steps may already have been forgotten, but on an on-going basis after separate steps or phases have been completed.

Project descriptions as a rule are a qualitative way of evaluating, although quantitative information can be integrated.

### **Example: project descriptions**

#### **Supporting the growth of recently graduated in-service teachers**

Member States involved: FI, AT, IT

Part of the evaluation of this project has been carried out with the help of a log or a diary (project descriptions).

The LOG evaluation procedure was considered extremely interesting and useful in that it permits the observation and recording of significant elements in the process which would be dismissed had more structured tools like e.g. questionnaires been used.

### **2.1.2 Minutes of meetings**

Most Comenius projects pay a lot of attention to jointly developing materials and an optimal - also formal - interaction between the project partners. At regular intervals they arrange meetings to discuss the state of the project. It is essential to keep good minutes of any meetings that are being held. The minutes should note not only the process and the products, but also the general feelings of the partners in terms of how they perceive and appreciate what has been achieved.

This aspect should continuously be kept in mind (see a.o. the questions mentioned in box 1), if one uses minutes of meetings for evaluation purposes. Otherwise there is a good chance that the minutes provide much useful information but fail to reflect adequately the notion of appreciation that is inherent in the concept 'evaluation'.

Taking minutes of meetings is less time consuming than the production of project descriptions and, of course, they are continuously made during the process and not just at the end. Minutes of meetings are only really productive, however, when they are properly planned, well structured and precisely recorded, especially with respect to the decisions taken.

**Example: minutes of meetings**

**Intercultural Education: Networking and sharing Good Practice**

Member States involved: DE, NO, DK, FI, FR, IE, IT, NL, GR, PT, GB

The evaluation of this project was carried out in several ways and overseen by the staff of the National Agency. Each meeting, seminar or study visit has been evaluated by the participants.

An independent consultant made a record (minutes) of all inputs, discussions and other outcomes throughout the event; her summary was examined by a core group for accuracy. In addition there was a self-assessment by the coordinating partner who checked the bursarial arrangements, the satisfaction of the partners and the degree to which the event matched the given objectives and the professional needs of the participants.

### **2.1.3 Group discussions**

A third way to evaluate Comenius 2 projects is via group discussions, preferably at particular moments during the project as well as at its end. It is important that all relevant project partners participate in these group discussions.

The most effective way of organizing a group discussion is when people have the opportunity to meet face to face. If this is not always possible, e.g. because meetings are too expensive for the project budget, the internet could be used as an alternative. By exchanging opinions and commenting on these mutually via the net, a body of evaluative assessments could be systematically built up step-by-step and interactively (the so-called Delphi-technique). Other options could be video-conferences or telephone-conferences.

Group discussions can easily degenerate into informal chats that can be very enjoyable but do not achieve their aims. Hence, good structuring and sharp focussing of any group discussion is important, not only in advance of, but also during the discussions.

Furthermore, for group discussions to be useful as an evaluation tool, clear records should be taken of any opinions and ideas expressed in order to be able to write a good and reliable chapter on 'project evaluation'.

Group discussions have several advantages. They can promote adherence to the project, improve the contact between the project partners and they can also be fun. On the other hand, there is always the risk that the discussions will be dominated by the most eloquent and powerful individuals in the group. An external evaluator can help avoid this and ensure balance.

**Example: group discussions**

**ECU: Education for Careers in the Union**

Member States involved: NL, GR, GB

This project is geared towards equipping educational staff for better educating young people for adult and working life in a European context. Progress group meetings have been used to monitor, review and evaluate the past period of time and anticipate the further progress of the project. Crucial questions for the group discussions were:

What were the goals of this phase? How did we do? What did we do? What did we do extra? What didn't we do and why?

In phase IV a matrix has been made up of the objectives of the project and the means used to meet these objectives to help the partners derive the questions and sources needed to find the answers.

The results of the evaluation have been published in the final report of the project.

#### **2.1.4 Individual interviews**

Individual, oral interviews are a good means to precisely check the vision and ideas of specific players in Comenius 2 projects. They can best be applied when only a small group of people is expected to provide relevant information and are less suitable when one needs the opinions of many individuals, because interviews are very labour intensive. A written questionnaire is the best way of operating when larger groups are involved (see 2.1.5).

Individual interviews lead to the best results if they are well prepared and structured. In this respect there is a continuum ranging from having only a global interview guideline to a precisely defined set of interview questions. A global interview guideline has the advantage that it leaves enough possibilities for the interviewee to bring in his/her own opinions. A precisely defined set of interview questions makes the interview more efficient and can also lead to results that are comparable to those of parallel interviews. Also in a precisely defined interview it is important to give the interviewee, preferably at the end, a possibility of adding any important evaluatory remarks he / she would like to make.

As a rule individual interviews provide high quality information. Compared to group discussions individual interviews have the big advantage that each person's evaluatory remarks are taken more fully into account. However, individual interviews are labour intensive and time consuming, not only while conducting them but also with regard to the elaboration of the results.

Interviews are an appropriate instrument if someone is available within the project group who possesses the necessary interview skills and is really able to create the proper atmosphere for a fruitful exchange. Otherwise the group should consider coopting an external expert. A potential conflict of interests, which suppresses relevant information from coming out in the open, is another reason for calling on an external expert for interviewing.

##### **Example: individual interviews**

##### **MILTON (Multimedia Inset for Language Teachers over a European Network)**

Member States involved: SE, IE, GB

At the end of the course participants were interviewed on a 'face to face' basis to ascertain what they felt about the effectiveness of the course. This was done with the help of evaluation guidelines.

The feedback from the participants resulted in a number of revisions: restructuring the course and the format of the on-line sessions, making the course more compact, making back-up systems to be used in case technology fails and introducing more sessions where participants practice their newly acquired skills.



### 2.1.5 Questionnaires

Evaluating aspects of Comenius 2 projects, involving a larger group of for example of 15 or more individuals, can best be done with the help of a questionnaire.

Questionnaires can consist of open questions, closed questions (with precoded answers) or a mixture of both. Open questions generally are difficult to handle. Mostly they are too time consuming for the respondents. For the 'researchers' they often imply a difficult coding process before the analysis of the information acquired can start. Because of these difficulties a questionnaire with as many closed questions as possible is recommended, while allowing one or a few more open questions to bring in perspectives other than those represented in the closed questions.

Formulating adequate closed questions is not an easy task. If the project partners do not have any experience of this, they would preferably delegate this task to a person who is knowledgeable about constructing questionnaires.

If they decide to formulate the questions themselves, they should devise unequivocal questions with answers that are mutually exclusive as well as exhaustive. Questions should be only those that are really relevant to the subject and should first be tried out in a small pilot before approaching the entire target group with them.

Once the questionnaires are filled in, the data have to be analysed. When the number of questionnaires is relatively small (e.g. < 25), it is possible to do this manually. Larger numbers or lengthy questionnaires should be analysed using a computer (feeding in the data and analysing these data with a good statistical programme, for instance SPSS).

One of the great merits of questionnaires (in which anonymity can be guaranteed) is that they can be analysed relatively easily and efficiently. Moreover many more people can be reached, providing the opportunity of obtaining a wide range of views on some major aspects of the project.

The major problem concerns the difficulty of formulating a good quality set of relevant questions. Often non-professionals make such fundamental mistakes in composing questions including answering categories, that the results are either difficult to interpret or even completely unreliable. That is why a pilot questionnaire is of such importance.

#### **Example: questionnaire**

##### **CLB Consultative pupils' support (for teachers as counsellors to pupils who have socio-emotional problems)**

Member States involved: BE, ES, AT, GB

The need for a proper internal evaluation of the work has been acknowledged by all partners. The project group adopted a scheme for evaluation developed in Suffolk: *a self assessment questionnaire* relating to effective teaching. The partners have adopted this device to make it useful for the evaluation of support work in all the areas concerned. This questionnaire has been applied twice: at the start and at the end of the course.

### 2.1.6 Observations

Observation is a good way of acquiring direct and objective information on actual behavioural. If a project aims at influencing the behaviour of a target group, the best way of evaluating whether or not the aim has been achieved is by observing its behaviour. This can best be done repeatedly in order to optimally assess if the developmental process is still focused on its original aims.

The advantage of direct, systematic observation is that it leads to a more accurate description of behaviour than a written or oral description based on interviews and questionnaires. For instance, if an interviewee states that he has liked a course, one can never be completely sure if indeed that is so. He might give a socially acceptable answer rather than his real opinion.

However, observation is labourious and time-consuming and therefore rather costly. Furthermore, one can only determine perceptible things and not the motives for behaviour. This can be solved by asking additional questions, thereby combining observation and interview techniques. Thirdly the observer can also influence the observed behaviour. This influence can be minimised using techniques like hidden cameras and participating observations.

Observations should be standardised and structured by determining beforehand exactly what is to be observed. Concrete aspects of behaviour have to be clearly defined in advance by the development of a system of categories, by which one can describe and later analyse the observed behaviour. The observer can pay attention to several aspects of behaviour such as frequency, duration and intensity.

The more observations are structured in advance, the greater will be the efficiency in the elaboration phase afterwards.

#### **Example: observation**

##### **Pour un professionnalisme plus poussé des enseignants (For an improved professionalism of teachers)**

Member States involved: LU, BE, FR

The evaluation conception in this project contributes to an active approach of evaluation by the teachers through videos registering their own experience while they are teaching, with a view to analyse/observe (whether or not with the help of observation forms) the application of didactic materials developed in the project.

### 2.1.7 Tests

Tests are relevant for Comenius 2 projects when one wants to try out the newly developed materials and evaluate / certificate the course results. If tests are chosen as an evaluation technique it is important that one firstly defines *what* has to be tested. If this is clear, other questions have to be answered such as: what the test should look like, what criteria have to be met in order to pass a test and whether additional measures have to be taken if the test has not been passed?

Tests can take a wide variety of forms: a written examination, object related performances, oral discussions, tasks to be completed, lessons or materials to be awarded as of sufficient or insufficient value.

Testing and evaluating, although different, share important similarities. Testing is a way of appraising, but only if the appraisal is done with the help of a measuring device that has to be exceeded to a certain degree in order to be successful. Evaluating also implies appraisal. Evaluation can, but does not necessarily have to be carried out making use of a measuring device. In an evaluation process, the situation or result is compared to some kind of standard, e.g. an expectation or a situation in advance.

**Example: tests**

**Projet pour le Développement et l'Amélioration des Compétences Consultatives et de Communication des Enseignants de Niveaux d'Enseignements Différents (Project for the development and improvement of the consultative and communication competences of teachers at different education levels).**

Member States involved: GR, FR, DE, GB

The tools used to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme included questionnaires concerning the teachers' interaction styles and their coping behaviour. They were filled in by the participants before and after their training and were then compared to similar data obtained from a group of early childhood education teachers who had not been trained.

Other evaluation tools were added including observation exercises, qualitative and quantitative analyses and conclusions. Questionnaires on children's behaviour were also filled in by the teachers before and after their training. Results show a definite positive effect of training in basic communication and counselling skills on the teachers' interaction with their pupils but also on their personal development.

## **2.2 Self evaluation or external evaluation**

With regard to all the evaluation techniques described in this chapter, partners in Comenius 2 projects can opt for either self evaluation or external evaluation (e.g. peer evaluation, cross evaluation between projects or evaluation by external consultants).

Of course the best guarantee for achieving objective evaluation results is by delegating the evaluation work to independent, external evaluators who are not biased for or against the project coordinator. The inclusion of external evaluators can be quite expensive. Therefore, the project coordinator and partners should clearly decide on the necessity of calling in an external evaluator, not only by looking at the contents of the project but also by taking into account the project budget that should not be disproportionately devoted to evaluation purposes.

If there are budget restraints, self evaluation is a sound alternative to external evaluation, especially when one or more members of the project group are competent to do the job. The strategies that can best be used when a project group decides to opt for self evaluation, are dependent on: which aspects the group wants to evaluate, when the group wants to evaluate (*ex ante*, *on-going* or *ex post*), if the group stresses only the summative or also the formative dimension of evaluation, the availability of people who are able to make evaluative conclusions and the capabilities of the project partners.

**Example: external evaluation**

**Brücke zwischen Schule und Arbeitswelt (Bridge between school and the world of work)**

Member States involved: AT, IT, GB, ES

Evaluation in this project has taken the form of external evaluation. A student in pedagogical sciences has been hired to monitor and assist the activities carried out.



### **3 Evaluation: what (which aspects to be evaluated)?**

Conceptual framework part 3

### 3.1 Evaluation of parts of the project-process

The evaluation of Comenius 2 projects should not only have a summative but also a formative character. This implies the necessity of integrating evaluation on an on-going basis and not as an activity to be carried out only *ex post* at the end of the project. Also, during the process, parts of the project-process ought to be evaluated. This seems to be a time consuming way of operating, but one should clearly bear in mind that when evaluation is done on a continuous basis, the final evaluation is only a minor step because a lot of preliminary work can be used as input.

Carrying out a formative as well as a summative evaluation means a shift in the timing of the workload rather than a shift in the workload itself. Moreover, evaluation is much easier when done on a regular basis when experience is still fresh than at the end of the project when a lot of information may have been forgotten.

Six aspects related to on-going evaluation have been presented in part 3 of the framework: 1. the management and structure of the project, including the schedule, 2. the definition of the point of departure, 3. the definition of the project aims (products), 4. the definition of the ways of achieving the project aims (process, actor roles), 5. feedback loops in the development phase and 6. pilots of newly developed materials. These six aspects will be elaborated in the following sections.

#### 3.1.1 Management and structure of the project, schedule

A first aspect that should be evaluated at regular intervals (*on-going*) is the management and the structure of the project. Elements that can be identified under this heading are:

##### Box 2

**Elements to be stressed in evaluating the management and structure of the project**

- working plan proposed
- steps in the process
- planning of the separate steps
- task division
- division of responsibilities
- schedule of the project
- progress control
- budgetary control
- contract arrangements
- information dissemination
- the European dimension of the project

Questions that can be asked with regard to the management and structure of the project are:

##### Box 3

**Questions that can be asked**

Are the management and the structure of the Comenius 2 project:

- feasible?
- effective?
- efficient?

In most cases the project coordinator will be the main informant on the management and structure of the project. It really is desirable, however, to also include the opinions of the other project partners, who can also provide valuable information on the management and structure of the project.

Techniques that can be used for evaluating of the management and structure of the project are:

#### Box 4

##### **Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- project descriptions, specifically devoted to this item
- minutes of meetings
- individual interviews
- group discussions
- questionnaires when many project partners have to be involved

##### **Example: good management of the project**

##### **To guarantee the right to a proper education and training for the various groups of the Occupational Travellers**

Member States involved: BE, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, IE, IT, NL, PT, AT, GR, LU

In this project, four product groups were established, each having 3 to 5 meetings per year. Each product group had a coordinator who was partly in charge of the outcomes of the process. The project leader had the final responsibility. The four product groups were involved in: the adaptation and actualisation of the follow-up system for bargee toddlers; the development of early learning booklets; an educational guide for parents; and an instruction booklet 'How to play with your child?'

The project partners had the tasks of providing: information about their target group and about developments and feedback about the process of the project to their national organisations and persons involved; directly or indirectly taking part in product groups and attending meetings; reporting to the project leader; taking into account the deadlines and requirements in the plan of the project; and of respecting the restrictions and possibilities of the project contract. The administrative and organisational support was provided by the Central Coordination Team. This support was essential to enable the project leader to manage the project properly.

### **3.1.2 Definition of the point of departure**

Comenius projects are expected to be innovative and this innovativeness has to be made explicit to ensure that the project aims are different from the usual way of operating. For evaluation purposes it is important to make the point of departure of projects as explicit as possible. Only when this has been done, can one determine what has been actually achieved by the project. The point of departure is the frame of reference against which the project results have to be appraised.

The point of departure can and, ideally to a certain degree, should have been defined already in the project proposal before starting with any planned activities, but it is also possible to do this in the first phase of the project. Another option is to provide an approximate description on the state of affairs in the project proposal and to work this out in more detail at the beginning of the project, for example get a better idea of the points of view of the potential users of the project results. Such an approach has been applied in many Comenius projects.

Project partners gather existing information on the subject of the project with a view to defining what can be used for the new approach, what should be avoided, which elements need to be recombined and where there is a need for additional developmental work.

In every project it is important to adequately incorporate the existing body of knowledge, not in order to reproduce what has already been achieved but to surpass this in order to offer better solutions for some specific problems.

Evaluative notions with regard to the point of departure can also contribute to project improvements. Questions that are relevant here are:

#### Box 5

**Guiding questions for evaluating the definition of the point of departure, to be further specified and adapted to the project**

- Which procedures have been used to identify the state of affairs?
- Who has been involved in this?
- Has the work been done before the beginning of the project or during the early stages of the project?
- Has the point of departure been clearly defined?
- Were all the project partners well informed about this aspect?
- Was there a general commitment to the definition of the state of affairs?
- Did the definition really function as a beacon for developmental activities?
- Which aspects have been stressed in the point of departure (e.g.: possible course contents, target groups of the project, didactics or ways of operating and existing measures for vulnerable youth that are being applied outside the school system).

Evaluation techniques that can be used to obtain answers to these relatively open questions are:

#### Box 6

**Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- group discussions
- individual interviews
- project descriptions stressing this particular element.

**Example: clearly defined point of departure**

**Cooperative Learning in Intercultural Education (CLIP)**

Member States involved: NL International Association for Intercultural Education

In all the countries of the EU there is still a gap between intent and what actually happens in schools. In spite of many international, European, and national recommendations and policy guidelines, intercultural education is still a marginal activity both in schools and in teacher education, often in the context of 'special projects'. The discourse about intercultural education in many countries is still mainly dominated by academics, politicians and individuals in the realm of education who are personally interested in the issues. It is not recognised and put into practice yet as a quality standard for school education or teacher education. Even in countries such as Sweden or the Netherlands where legislation is supportive, intercultural education is still marginalised in teacher education.



### 3.1.3 Definition of the project aims (products)

The Comenius projects are geared towards the initial education of teachers, the professional development of education staff, and meeting the needs of specific target groups. The project proposals that are sent for approval to the Commission must make clear that the aim of the project falls into these categories.

As a rule, the clearer the project aims are formulated, the better it can be evaluated. Nevertheless, in innovative projects, this is not always true because project aims can never be fully determined beforehand. To a certain degree the project aim can be determined at the start but, discounting for experiences, it develops up to the point where a concrete product evolves during the process. Hence, defining the target is an on-going process that deserves attention at several phases of the project. Regular reflections on the aim of the project while it is running, improves the chances that it will develop effectively and efficiently in the desired direction.

Questions that can be posed with regard to the project aims are:

#### Box 7

**Guiding questions for defining the project aims, to be further specified and adapted to the project**

- Were the project aims formulated in the proposal sufficiently clear for determining the work to be carried out?
- Who has been involved in formulating the first project aims?
- Was there a general commitment in the project group on the aims to be strived for?
- Have there been attempts to further specify the aims during the process, apart from developing the products?
- Who participated in this further specification?
- Was it possible to achieve the aim or were adjustments necessary?
- If adjustments had to be made, what were they and did they lead to a better outcome?
- In working towards its target (education and courses) has the project group taken account of the relevant quality criteria?
- If yes, what kind of criteria were considered?
- Can you, based on your experiences in your project, give fruitful suggestions to any potential project coordinators/partners on how to define project aims?

The questions formulated with regard to defining the aims of the project, are again relatively open. This means that they can best be approached with the help of:

#### Box 8

**Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- group discussions
- individual interviews
- project descriptions

**Example: clear aims set**

**Sustainability: Water in Europe; too much and too little**

Member States involved: NL, ES, GB, IT, DE, FR

The aims of this project were:

- to start networks of schools, cooperating at a distance to: exchange information on regional water problems, explore and exchange possible solutions and finally produce some important principles;
- to develop a Comenius course to promote and engage teachers in an environmental regional network;
- and to explore and promote the possibilities of using ICT in the regional and interregional networks.

### **3.1.4 Determination of ways to reach the project aims**

When the point of departure and the project aims are determined, ideas can be developed on how to achieve the aims and how to arrive from the present situation to that which is desired. What should be done and by whom?

Concerning the question *what* should be done, one can think of:

- consulting literature
- reading documents
- interviewing experts
- observing good practices
- interacting with the target group
- consulting colleagues
- exchanging information
- participating in working groups
- providing feedback to project partners
- cooperating in pilots of the materials developed
- maintaining contact with the European Commission or the National Agency
- writing reports
- participating in the dissemination of the project results

Concerning the question *by whom* one can think of:

- the project coordinator
- individual project partners with special expertise
- working groups responsible for certain project parts
- the entire project group
- and external consultants or field players

The ways of achieving the project aims are expressed in the project proposal to a certain degree but become more and more concrete during the process. That is why regularly reflecting on them can be a good means of keeping the project on the right track.

Questions relevant for evaluating the ways in which project groups have operated to reach their target are:

## Box 9

### **Guiding questions for evaluating the ways to reach the project aims, to be further specified and adapted to the project**

- Which project steps have been defined in the proposal?
- How have these steps been carried out in practice?
- Were the steps planned adequate and sufficient for achieving the project aim?
- If not, why not and what modifications had to be made (additional steps or alternative ones)?
- What would you do differently if you were to carry out the project again?
- What partners have been involved in the project?
- What was their task or role?
- What kind of responsibilities did they have?
- Did the project partners do the things they were expected to do?
- If not, who didn't and what was the main reason why they didn't?
- Did the tasks the partners had to carry out properly suit their capabilities?
- Were the partners themselves satisfied with their contribution?
- How was the atmosphere in the group?
- Did communication between the group members work?
- If not, why not?
- Did language difficulties influence the communication in the project group?
- Which solutions for language difficulties did the group come up with?
- How could operating in project groups be improved to such an extent that one could speak of an ideal situation?

For identifying answers on these questions one could make use of

## Box 10

### **Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- project descriptions
- group discussions
- individual interviews
- minutes of meetings
- and questionnaires (with regard to the role of the partners, when there are many of them)

### **Example: good task division**

#### **Resource Net: Linking Teacher Development and Resource Centres across Europe**

Member States involved: IE, DK, PT, SCO

The task division in this project has been as follows:

- each partner was responsible for identifying and supporting local needs; for contributing to the materials package; and for the delivery of elements of the teachers' training course
- the Danish, Portuguese and Irish partners were responsible for translations as required
- the Danish and the Scottish partner were responsible for taking the lead on technology issues (Internet-site etc.)
- the Scottish partner has been given the special responsibility for developing Performance Indicators and, closely connected to this, the Evaluation Strategy.

### 3.1.5 Feedback loops in the development phase

Regularly asking for and providing feedback in a developmental process is essential because it maintains and even improves the commitment of the partners to the project and also guarantees a better quality of the products or the project results. Not all feedback should immediately lead to adaptation. In other words, feedback should also be critically assessed before taking a decision on whether or not to adjust the process or the products.

Feedback on the process (steps taken and partner roles) can very well be put on the agenda for the meetings between the project partners, although other options exist. Feedback on the products can be given e.g. in group discussions or on an individual bilateral basis.

Some evaluatory questions concerning feedback are:

#### Box 11

**Guiding questions for evaluating feedback loops in the development phase, to be further specified and adapted to the project**

- Were feedback loops planned in the project proposal?
- Did these loops refer to the processes as well as the products or only to one of these?
- Has this feedback indeed taken place and, if yes, in what way (by whom and how)?
- Did this lead to alterations in the project?
- Was the feedback constructive?
- Did the feedback clearly lead to improvements in the processes and the products of the project?
- How was group functioning affected by the two types of feedback: feedback on the products and the feedback on the process?

For evaluating the feedback in a project several techniques can be used:

#### Box 12

**Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- project descriptions
- individual interviews
- minutes of meetings
- group discussions

**Example: feedback loops in the process**

**Wirtschaftserziehung für Schüler der Primar- und Sekundarstufe 1**

Member States involved: AT, FI, NL, GB

For the project a CD-Rom has been developed by highly qualified programmers and technical staff. This CD-Rom has been applied in the participating countries during the second and third project year. Because also a homepage has been installed enabling the users to express their experiences and comments, evaluation material has been collected on a continuous basis.

This material has been investigated by two institutes with regard to the technical comments and by the remaining institutes with regard to the comments on contents and didactics. The results have been used to continuously adapt the product. This has resulted in a diversity of product versions which are to a growing extent satisfactory.

### 3.1.6 Pilots of newly developed materials

Newly developed materials in a Comenius project can be tested in several ways, ranging from first appraisals by peers or by members of the target group to a full implementation of the results in a pilot or, as far as teachers courses are concerned, in actual practice.

The Comenius 2 projects vary quite strongly: target groups differ, training contents differ and didactics are divergent. This makes it difficult to formulate general aspects which should be accounted for in evaluating new materials. These aspects, at least the more detailed ones, have to be determined within the project groups themselves.

Below are some hints about the form of questions one could consider. These are:

#### Box 13

##### **Guiding questions for evaluating the pilots of newly developed materials**

- In which context can the new materials be placed (type and duration of the course)?
- What is the target group to be addressed?
- What functions do the new materials have for education?
- Where has the pilot or course taken place?
- What exactly has been piloted, when and for how long?
- Who in the project group was involved in the try-out?
- What was his / her task?
- For which part of the target group has the pilot (the course) been carried out?
- How many persons from the target group were involved?
- What was the opinion of the target group with regard to the pilot (training contents, training process, didactical approaches, teacher contribution, the course group)?
- Has the target group been presented with some form of examination at the end of the pilot or the course?
- What were the results?
- What kind of follow up is considered and is such a follow up feasible?

Some of these questions, mainly the first ones, can best be answered in individual or group interviews or in project descriptions, whereas other questions, especially those devoted to the target group or the course, can be addressed by observations, tests or questionnaires.

#### Box 14

##### **Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- individual or group interviews
- project descriptions
- observations
- tests
- questionnaires

**Example: pilots of the materials developed****Here we are I & II**

Member States involved: NL, DE, AT, LU

This project is geared towards a training pack which focuses on intercultural education and on the fight against racism and xenophobia. One of the elements in this training pack was a 30 min. videofilm with portraits of eight young people from four European countries.

The video film, complemented by didactic materials, has been tested in schools in Germany and Austria. The film was also shown and discussed in several groups during a youth festival in Bremen in December 1998. In addition, experts outside the developmental group have been asked to give their opinion on the product.

In January 1999 the developmental group decided to make some modifications on the basis of the pilots. For instance, it has been acknowledged that in countries that are not accustomed to make films with subtitles (e.g. Germany), it is necessary to enable the target group to concentrate on the filmtext with the help of a written version. This version has been presented in a newspaper, the main aim of which was to give in-depth information on the topics dealt with in the video-film.

### 3.2 Final evaluation of the project

If a project group has dealt with evaluation on an on-going basis, the final evaluation does not require much extra work. The results of the interim evaluations can be used perfectly for most aspects of the final evaluation.

The answers on all the questions posed in the sections of this chapter are relevant for the evaluation of the process and the contribution of the project partners, with a special emphasis on the questions regarding 'ways to achieve the target'.

For evaluating the final products the project group can lean heavily on the results of the pilots of newly developed materials.

In the section about the management and structure of the project some attention has been devoted to the evaluation of the European dimension and the project facilities. It might be necessary to elaborate a little more on these two aspects for the final evaluation.

With regard to the positive or negative spin-offs, the on-going evaluation, together with the evaluation of the project's impact and the meta-evaluation, probably provide enough information to give a proper, overall appraisal within a relatively short time.

All the recommendations and questions in this chapter are relevant for those project groups which, for whatever reason, decide to evaluate at the end of the project rather than on an on-going basis. They can use them to compose an evaluation strategy that optimally meets their own project and project needs.

**Example: positive spin-off****Imeachtai Ealaiona**

Member States involved: IE, GB, NO

The impact of this project, the main purpose of which was to develop an arts/cultural school intervention for integrating the children of migrant workers into the community and facilitating equal opportunities through extra tuition in the language of the host country, was much greater than anticipated.

Groups from other regions have expressed interest in the project and the project partners have been asked to consult on the development of similar projects in other areas. Another spin-off is that the project started to become involved in a great number of European Programmes. This contributed very strongly to increased international cooperation and exchange of experiences.

### **3.3 Evaluation of the project's impact**

Comenius 2 projects are subsidised by the Commission not with a view to only set up nice experiments but also to have an impact on regular educational practice in the Member States. That is why a proper evaluation of a project's impact is absolutely necessary.

The first and probably most direct impact a Comenius project can have is at school level. The innovations should directly or indirectly influence the contents or didactics in the schools or in other organisations that are participating in the project. This seems to be a minimum standard.

What the project partners should strive for is to exert influence that goes beyond this minimum standard. They should try to disseminate the project results to other target groups as well, for instance: to other schools or organisations; to policy makers for eventually incorporating the project results in the national, regional or local education system (only if this is feasible); to the Schools' inspectorate; to other (potential) Comenius partnerships who might profit from the experiences gained, not only with regard to the products but also with regard to the processes; to the National Agencies which have the task of coordinating and promoting the Comenius programme; to networks of influential experts on the subject matter so as to gain their commitment too; and to the citizens who, in fact, ought to become acquainted with Comenius project results, if only to be knowledgeable about how part of the collective means are used and how they contribute to the needs of society.

Questions like the following can be posed with regard to the evaluation of a project's impact, including the dissemination strategies (see also the chapters on dissemination strategies):

## Box 15

### **Guiding questions for evaluating the project's impact, to be further specified and adapted to the project**

- What has been the subject of dissemination (course programmes, course products, process expertise, other)?
- Was dissemination seriously and precisely considered at the start of the project?
- How was dissemination planned (think about the context, the structure of the plan, the processes, the responsibilities, the schedule, the costs, and multiplier effects foreseen)?
- What has been the target group of the dissemination: teachers and teachers in training; pupils/students or marginalised youth; schools; policy makers; the Schools' inspectorate; national agencies; other (potential) Comenius participants; networks of experts; the European citizens?
- At what level did dissemination, geared to the target groups above, take place (local, regional, national, European, global)?
- What dissemination channels have been chosen (e.g. of: internet, CD-Rom, video, books, manuals, articles, symposiums, conferences, workshops, expositions, exhibitions)?
- What has been done to adequately interconnect the dissemination channels and the target group(s)?
- Were the dissemination activities carried out according to plan?
- If no, why not and what other steps have been taken?
- What were the effects of dissemination (think of changes that have been realised and numbers of persons addressed)?
- What are, in your opinion, the main barriers to disseminating Comenius project results?
- Has the impact of the project been influenced by language difficulties?
- If yes, which difficulties and were they solved?
- Has the project really had a clear impact on school(s) and if yes, what kind of impact?
- Has the project affected or improved the functioning of the teachers involved?
- If yes, in which way?
- Have the project results been adopted by organisations who were not involved as a partner in the project?
- Has the project had any influence on the national, regional or local education system?
- If so, what and if not, why not?
- Could you mention a few measures that might be taken to increase a project's impact?

Evaluation techniques that might be used for answering the questions referred to above are:

## Box 16

### **Evaluation techniques that can be used**

- project descriptions
- individual interviews
- group discussions

In some cases for determining the effects of dissemination it might be worthwhile to set out questionnaires among the target group addressed.



Short term effects and impact in the longer term should be distinguished with regard to the impact of project results. A project can exert an impact in the field long after it has been formally finished. For example, it may take quite a long time before results of a Comenius project can formally be incorporated into the curriculum of primary schools. The real impact might only become apparent much later. Therefore the expectations on the sustainability and long lasting effects of the project results should be taken into account when evaluating the project's impact.

### 3.4 Meta-evaluation

If evaluation is not only carried out for summative but also for formative reasons - which is clearly recommended in this handbook (see chapter 1) -, it is worthwhile to also briefly evaluate the evaluation that has been carried out. Such a meta-evaluation can give the project partners an understanding of the achievements of specific evaluation activities, support certain approaches and supersede others. Questions that can be asked are:

#### Box 16

##### **Guiding questions for meta-evaluation**

- Which evaluation methodologies and techniques have been applied?
- Which aspects are evaluated in what way?
- Which techniques /aspects were easy to handle?
- Which were causing problems?
- Have certain aspects of the conceptual framework, presented at the beginning of chapter 3, not been evaluated?
- What was the reason for this?
- If you were to evaluate your project once again, would you choose the same strategies or would you operate in a different way?
- If you would choose the same strategies, why would you do that?
- If you would like to operate differently, why would you do this and what would be the main differences?



## Part B - Dissemination

### Introduction: a framework for dissemination strategies

Dissemination means spreading a message (subject of dissemination) among groups of persons or organisations (the target groups) via one or more channels with a view to achieving a certain impact. For this purpose a dissemination strategy should be planned.

The initiators of dissemination are the Comenius project partnerships. A conceptual framework is presented for this handbook to support partnerships and projects with their dissemination strategies, consisting of the following elements:

- the *subject of dissemination*, as a rule course programmes, course products or process expertise;
- the *planning of dissemination* in which attention is devoted to the context in which the dissemination takes place, the structure of the activities to be carried out, the preferred type of processing, the responsibilities of the project partners, the schedule, the costs and the multiplier effects which are aimed at;
- the *target group(s)* to be addressed;
- the *dissemination channels* that might be used;
- the *effects of dissemination* that can only be optimal when certain barriers are avoided;
- and the *evaluation of dissemination*, also dealt with in chapter 3 on evaluation strategies.

To identify potential target groups the compilers of this handbook have consulted a large number of Comenius documents (e.g. policy papers, discussion notes, the Compendia of the projects, project reports). The main target groups which are to be considered by Comenius 2 project partners, are: teachers and teachers in training; schools and specific categories of pupils/students and marginalised youth. Furthermore, target groups for dissemination activities could be other actual and potential Comenius participants and third level institutions like: the Schools' inspectorate; networks of experts; National Agencies responsible for the Comenius programme; policymakers in the field of education and, last but not least, the European citizens. These target groups can be addressed at several levels: local, regional, national, European and global. For effective dissemination strategies, not only are the numbers of persons addressed in the target groups important, but also how these target groups are addressed (think of aspects like planning and desirable dissemination channels).



To provide relevant details on dissemination channels the compilers of this handbook have made a systematic inventory of Comenius action 2 and 3 projects active in 1999, resulting in an elaborate list of channels used by groups/persons that already have taken part in Comenius. The channels are included in the conceptual framework and box 28.

In the chapters 4 to 8 of this handbook the six boxes of the framework, covering all the separate elements within it, are elaborated. Emphasis is put on application, not on theoretical considerations behind the framework.



## 4 Subject and planning of dissemination

### 4.1 Subject of dissemination

To determine a strategy for dissemination, the most important question is what has to be disseminated; in other words: what is the subject of dissemination? The subject of dissemination should continuously be the focal point, not only when dissemination activities are initiated, but in the entire dissemination process.

Box 18

**The subject of dissemination is the focal point in the entire dissemination process**

#### **Example: subjects of dissemination**

##### **My Europe**

Member States involved: SE, GR, IE, GB, LT

This project aimed at developing awareness within the EU through developing comparative European studies in schools and resulted in the following products to be used as subjects to be disseminated:

- a practical introduction on CD-Rom to the video museum methodology where children can explore their own roots and community in a European context
- two attractive cartoon manuals to be used by students on how to develop a video museum printed on card
- a video tape which includes the students' work in all six participating schools
- an electronic display on disk which demonstrates decision making in the EU, giving both an overall view of the system and four case studies of the development of four different legislative decisions and the interplay between the EU institutions in each case
- and a fact pack on the EU for teachers including web addresses, bibliographies, lists of key EU documents, videos, CD-Roms and addresses of relevant EU institutions and NGOs at the European level.

For Comenius projects the subjects of dissemination are as a rule: course programmes, course products or materials, and process expertise which might be very worthwhile for other actual and potential Comenius partnerships, mainly for helping these to choose the best way of operating in their projects, taking into account the diversity of experiences already gained elsewhere.

Box 19

**You are advised and requested to not only disseminate the products but also process expertise, particularly for other actual and potential Comenius partnerships**

#### **Example: dissemination of process expertise**

##### **Stanislas (geared towards raising achievement levels of school children)**

Member States involved: AT, FR, DE, NL, GB

Dissemination and communication of process expertise has been done amongst the participants of the sister project 'Maid Marian'. The coordinators of the two projects worked closely together to maintain and build on the projects. The successful in-service event in Finland under the Maid Marian project owed a lot to the experience and close contact with the Project Stanislas.

Course programmes and materials can be disseminated with a view to entirely integrating them into elements of the educational system, e.g. in training for youth, or in teacher training, as well as in organisations other than those involved in the project. This is generally the maximum that can be achieved. A less ambitious but desirable option is to provide information to the group of people who might be interested in the subject matter in order to broaden their horizons, preferably in such a way that they take account of this input in their own activities.

Box 20

**Try to disseminate the course programmes and products as an entity but also pay attention to dissemination in the form of transfer of ideas**

#### **4.2 Planning of dissemination**

When Comenius project partners are thinking of disseminating the results of their project, they should seriously take account of the context in which they are operating, not only as a collective but also as individuals in their daily activities. Each project partner has to adapt the dissemination strategy to his/her own context.

Box 21

**Place the dissemination activities adequately in context**

The possibilities of the project partners should be optimally exploited. Specifically, one could think of the organisations they work for, the professional group(s) to which they belong, the political influence they can have, the networks they take part in, the infrastructure they have at their disposal, the resources they can use, and the influence they can exert in schools.

Box 22

**Make use of the diverse contexts in which the project partners normally are operating**

Having properly reflected on the context of dissemination, project partners ought to generate a structure or a plan of dissemination activities to be carried out. It is best to do this from the very start, when formulating the project proposal.

Box 23

**If possible, work out a dissemination plan already in the project proposal**

**Example: good planning of dissemination**

**Face to Face**

Member States involved: BE, NL, DE, GB, FR, AT



Face to Face is an international media education project for encouraging international communication between young students from various ethnic groups in Europe.

After having evaluated the newly developed and tested Face to Face method, the promotion of the method became the core activity. For this purpose the partners developed a promotion plan, in which the following points were decided:

- the target group to be addressed: international education networks, other European and national structures around teachers, educational institutions and the individual teachers of multicultural secondary schools
- the message
- the schedule
- the instruments of promotion: Website, Newsletter, Free publicity, Promotional Information Manual, Presentations and Teacher Training Seminars.

**Aspects that should be considered when making a plan for dissemination include:**

- *the subjects* that are supposed to be disseminated such as course programmes or other educational products, process expertise, methodologies, etc.;
- *the context* of dissemination, e.g. accounting for country specific peculiarities;
- *the time at which dissemination should take place*: already during the process, e.g. to enhance commitment within the target group, or only in the final stage of the project. The importance of dissemination activities during the project is generally underestimated.
- *what the dissemination process should or could look like*: a process that is clearly delineated and defined with regard to the concrete dissemination activities, or a process that is geared more towards collecting ideas for dissemination at regular intervals. These ideas are worked out only after decisions have been taken by the project partners on the most valuable option(s);
- *the target groups* to be addressed (see chapter 5);
- *the dissemination channels* which might best be used (see chapter 6);
- *whether dissemination is to be seen as the responsibility of the entire project group or alternatively should better be delegated to a specially appointed committee*;
- *the schedule* which should account for, among others things, the necessary preparatory activities, the difficulties one might have in contacting experts who might be needed, and calendar periods that are problematic for dissemination purposes, e.g. holidays and periods in which the target group has a heavy workload;
- *the costs*: how much money has been allocated in the budget proposal for dissemination purposes, how should this money be spent, what direct or indirect revenues can be expected from the different dissemination options one can consider, what is the cost/benefit ratio among the options one has at his/her disposal?

- *the multiplier effect*. Because it is very labour and time consuming to address many people in the target group(s) directly, the project partners should pay particular attention to the multiplier effects that can be achieved by addressing persons or groups of people who have the capacity to influence other persons/groups for whom the project results can have value added. Another multiplier effect could be brought about by generating and disseminating materials in such a way that more target groups can be reached.
- *the effects* a project group wants to realise with its dissemination activities (see chapter 7);
- *the dissemination barriers* that might become relevant (see chapter 7);
- *the evaluation* of the dissemination strategies (see chapter 8).

**Example: multiplier effect.**

**Primary goes Europe (for bringing in the European dimension in primary education)**

Member States involved: PT, DE, GB, AT

Since its very beginning the project 'Primary goes Europe' has strived for a multiplier effect; on the one hand through the active involvement of more than 50 primary education teachers and their school managers in the development of the manual (1500 copies) and on the other hand through cooperation with directors, inspectors and others in the forefront of curriculum development.

## 5 Target groups of dissemination

To disseminate the results of Comenius 2 projects properly and successfully, it is extremely important to clearly consider the target group or groups that should be addressed. These target groups have to be taken into account when the materials that have to be disseminated are conceptualised and also when a choice has to be made which dissemination channels can best be used.

When conceptualising the materials, the target group(s) must be kept in mind, particularly on the following aspects:

### Box 24

#### **Aspects of the target groups relevant for conceptualising dissemination materials**

- the interest they have or might have in the project results
- the kind of contribution they might make to a further distribution of what has been developed
- the level at which they can incorporate information (are they experts in the field of concern or not?)
- the ways in which they are usually addressed by other similar groups who ask for their attention (one can decide to apply the same approach or deliberately choose for another one)
- specific limitations that could prevent the information from having the desired impact
- the language in which the materials have to be presented (only native tongue when national target groups are at stake or in other languages in order to reach target groups in other countries or groups which operate internationally)

In order to choose suitable dissemination channel(s) for different actors, the target groups have to be taken into account with regard to questions such as:

### Box 25

#### **Questions concerning the target group(s) relevant for choosing dissemination channels**

- how big is the target group, how many persons are to be addressed?
- how interested are the target groups in the project results? (if the motivation for getting acquainted with the materials developed is high, less effort has to be put in transfer activities than when motivation is relatively low)
- what are the dissemination channels by which the target groups are regularly approached?
- are the target groups often faced with information overload?
- what are the technical possibilities the target groups have at their disposal? (internet facilities, up-to-date computer equipment (hard- and software), access to magazines, time and resources to visit conferences, expositions and the like, etc.)
- what are the main barriers to transferring information to the target group(s) via apparently suitable dissemination channels?
- how could these barriers be removed?

For Comenius action 2 projects several target groups are or seem to be relevant. These groups are:

#### **a. The project partners themselves**

In fact, the project group is the initiator of the project activities and the nucleus for disseminating the results to a wider public. Although sometimes forgotten, it is important to disseminate the results of the project to the colleagues in the organisations participating in the project, not only in order to create an optimal basis or support for the activities of the project and for what has been developed, but also to optimally facilitate the dissemination process aimed at reaching other target groups. Especially project partners who have teacher-colleagues should not forget their own colleagues!

#### **b. Teachers and teachers in training**

Comenius 2 projects are aimed at developing initial teacher education, teacher training courses and new educational approaches for specific categories of pupils/students and/or marginalised youth. In order to reach the widest possible public in these target groups, dissemination activities can best be concentrated on the educational staff, either by stimulating them to participate in teachers' training courses or by giving them an insight into the merits of the new educational programmes.

#### **c. Schools**

Comenius 2 projects geared towards the education of specific target groups and to teacher training courses are supposed not only to have an impact on elements of school education, but should become an integral part of primary or secondary schools. This means that project groups ought to incorporate the innovations in their own institutions and in associated schools.

The project partners can take advantage of the day to day contacts with colleagues, students and eventually management and supporting staff to disseminate the project results in their own establishments.

Alternative means should be used for reaching other schools, for instance: the networks in which schools are operating, local or regional meetings between school managers/staff, school magazines, the Schools' inspectorate, National Agencies and policymakers. Of course the teacher training courses can also be organised in such a way as to improve the impact of the innovations on school life as much as possible.

Exerting a clear impact on an entire school or educational organisation can be more difficult for some projects which are strongly delineated within a specific subject like history, chemistry, etc. Nevertheless, the partners engaged in such projects should try to achieve a spin-off that might enrich school aspects other than the ones focused on in the project directly. How this can best be achieved completely depends on the character of the project. But if the project partners tackle the issue of dissemination together at the level of schools, they will certainly find ways to do so. This could simply start with a brainstorm session.

#### **d. Other (potential) Comenius participants**

It is also important to guarantee proper horizontal information exchange in Comenius, in other words, to pay attention to the dissemination of the project results towards other Comenius participants.

The relevance of disseminating the products of Comenius projects to other project groups is dependent on the common ground of those projects.

This is different for process expertise. Learning from each others way of operating in a Comenius project can be beneficial for many partnerships, regardless of the subject of the project.

In particular, potential Comenius project partners can benefit from dissemination of the project results already established, not only with regard to products but perhaps even more so to process expertise. On the basis of experiences already gained, new Comenius project partners can probably make better proposals than when they have to start from scratch.

#### **e. Schools' inspectorate**

The Schools' inspectorates can be an important target group for disseminating Comenius project results, depending on the roles and responsibilities they have within the education systems in the Member States. They may formally acknowledge what has been achieved and, closely connected to this, advise other schools or authorities at local, regional or national level to adopt an approach similar to the one chosen in the project.

In this way Schools' inspectorates can clearly have a multiplier effect, certainly when a Comenius project has been able to demonstrate that it can be very worthwhile for improving school functioning.

#### **f. Networks**

An effective multiplier effect can also be realised when Comenius project partners address national or international influential networks of professionals and experts in the field of education. Especially Comenius 3 networks should be mentioned here. Often these networks contribute to or sometimes even dominate the societal discussion within their area of expertise. They publicize public opinion raising articles, write books, teach new educationalists, and they lecture or present their ideas in conferences and the like. They also take part in political debate.

Because of this often central position of networks of professionals, Comenius project partners should seriously consider addressing this target group to encourage them to consider the results in their debates. In some cases this might be rather difficult, but the effects these networks often have can far outweigh the efforts which have to be made.

#### **g. National Agencies**

The National Agencies, in collaboration with the Commission, are responsible for the organisation of conferences, meetings, seminars and other events with the aim of ensuring publicity and visibility for Comenius and for improving its management, and the presentation, dissemination and assessment of results.

Dissemination activities geared towards the National Agencies are necessary for every project, because these Agencies may be able to contribute to the dissemination of results of projects to educational field players and policymakers.

#### **h. Policymakers**

Policymakers can be addressed either in a direct way or indirectly via the Schools' inspectorate, via networks of professionals or via the National Agencies. A direct approach could be considered when a project clearly leads to improvements in the central regulations on the curricula in primary and secondary general education, when new educational concepts have been developed which can broaden the horizon of the policymakers or when a project group wants its teacher training course to be accredited as a part of a public education or training programme.

Another possible reason for directly addressing policymakers in the dissemination activities is to raise support for starting up a new project or eventually the prolongation of a project.

If a project group considers the option of directly addressing policymakers, it should clarify questions like the following:

#### Box 26

**Questions that need consideration when a project group wants to directly address policymakers**

- for what purpose does the group want to directly address the policymakers?
- which policymakers can best be contacted?
- is it possible to have a face-to-face contact with relevant policymakers or must other approaches be used?
- can a more continuous lobbying process improve the chances of achieving the aim or does such a process seem counterproductive?
- are the chances of gaining political influence enlarged by activating other groups or field players as well?
- if yes, what other groups or field players can best be activated for this purpose?
- and what possibilities are left open when directly addressing policymakers does not lead to the desired effects?

When a project group opts for an indirect way of addressing policymakers (so via networks, National Agencies or the Schools' inspectorate) the following questions can be posed:

## Box 27

### **Questions that need consideration when a project group wants to indirectly address policymakers**

- what is the best entry point one can choose to indirectly address policymakers (a network, the National Agency or the Schools' inspectorate)?
- is it possible to use more entry points and if yes, which combination seems best?
- what can the project partners do themselves to increase the impact of the indirect approach?
- can other field players make additional contributions to increase the chances of exerting the desired impact?
- if yes, which field players and how can they be activated?

It is not an easy task to really influence policymakers. This target group is presented with many demands from a wide variety of field players. Therefore a project group that wants its results to have a clear impact, has to work out a well founded plan for dissemination geared towards policy makers. If a project group only wants a sample of policymakers to be aware of what has happened in the project and what kinds of results the project has led to, a simpler form of information dissemination can be used (think of e.g. written documents, internet, or articles in a magazine).

### **i. European citizens**

Dissemination geared towards European citizens is important for giving this broad target group the opportunity of getting acquainted with Comenius, if only to be accountable for the use of collective means.

Dissemination amongst European citizens can best be done with the help of the mass media such as national, regional and local television, radio, newspapers, and the internet. Books and written documents are less suitable for reaching this general public.

A Comenius 2 project group that wants to disseminate its results also towards the European citizens, can decide to do this separately or together with other projects (eventually under the coordination of a National Agency or the European Commission).

Another aspect that deserves consideration is on what level the project group wants to appeal to the European citizens. Does the local/regional level suffice or is a national or even international level required?

#### **Example: target groups addressed**

##### **Expertise 5x5: Expanding European Resources in Teacher In-Service Education**

Member States involved: PT, FI, DE, NL, GB

The dissemination activities of the results of this project were geared towards several target groups.

In a dissemination conference in Birmingham in 1997 over 30 participating schools and one National Agency were represented.

The five partners have also been active in systematically disseminating information in their countries with a view to reaching schools and other agencies. Detailed information regarding the Comenius course 'School Without Boundaries' has been disseminated both in the Comenius Catalogue and by the project coordinator.

Dissemination geared towards a wider public has been done through the project's construction of an Internet Website. Real curriculum development has occurred in 25 schools; children have been interested and excited by communicating directly with other children in schools in the other four countries.

The project has led to the writing of academic articles as well as to the production of other worthwhile project presentations. And, last but not least, partners have been planning new networks for the future, e.g. for the new round of Comenius.



## 6 Dissemination channels

In order to provide some information on dissemination channels which apparently are suitable for Comenius projects, an inventory has been made of the Comenius action 2 and Comenius action 3.1 Compendia of 1999. This has resulted in the following list of channels (including the frequency with which they have been taken up in the project descriptions):

Box 28

<b>Most frequently used dissemination channels in recent Comenius projects</b>	<b>n=</b>
1. Internet	84
2. Manuals, readers, reports, publications, papers, documents	53
3. CD-Rom	51
4. Seminars, conferences, meetings, symposia, workshops	28
5. Video	28
6. Handbooks, books	14
7. Networks of experts	11
8. Multi-media	7
9. Expositions, exhibitions	7
10. Parties/festivals, theatres, ateliers creatifs, intercultural days	6
11. Articles in a magazine	4
12. Video conferencing	4
13. Internet conferencing	3
14. Interactive DVD	2
15. Case studies	2
16. Round tables	2
17. Laboratories	2
18. Photographs	2
19. Library	1
20. Meeting point	1
21. Performances	1
22. Newsletter	1
23. Film	1
24. TV programme (not in the project but in a later phase)	1

Only limited use is made of the traditional mass media of television, radio and newspapers. This is probably due to the often limited scope of the projects for these channels, and to the barriers that must be overcome to acquire access to these media (e.g. the lack of expertise of teachers in making press releases). These barriers might be reduced when a project group takes into account the possibility of disseminating its results together with other project groups and the fact that all three traditional mass media are represented not only at national and international, but also at regional or local level. Especially the potential of local media (television, radio, newspapers, free local papers) should be explored because they do not have such high entrance barriers as the national media.

However, the context in which these local media operate (degree of organisation, infrastructure), is quite different among the Member States.

The internet seems to be the most attractive dissemination channel for Comenius project groups, because it is technically easily accessible, it has a very wide scope and because it is cost-effective. Nevertheless before deciding to use the internet for dissemination, project partners should anticipate the impact this medium can have on their target group(s). Although the internet is a fast growing channel of communication, the expectations about its impact are often overestimated. Developing a web site is not enough. A dissemination strategy is needed to ensure that people belonging to the target groups take notice of the information that is put on the site.

Manuals, readers, etc. are a good second on the list. CD-Rom is also popular. However, the frequent use of new technologies (internet, CD-Rom, video) does not reduce the need to have personal contacts. This becomes clear from the relatively frequent use which is still made of seminars, conferences, meetings, symposia and workshops, of networks of experts, of expositions and exhibitions, and of parties/festivals, theatres, 'ateliers creatifs' and intercultural days.

Before deciding which dissemination channel(s) can best be used, project partners have to take account of the aspects listed below.

#### Box 29

##### **Aspects relevant for choosing the dissemination channels**

1. The subject of dissemination
2. The context of dissemination
3. The target group(s) one wants to reach
4. Additional measures to attract the attention of the target group(s)
5. The scope and degree of penetration of the dissemination channels
6. The attractiveness of the dissemination channels for the target group(s)
7. External experts one has to consult, for instance, for making a good video or for organising a symposium
8. The cost of the dissemination channels
9. The revenues that can be expected

It is of particular importance to make a solid and well-grounded connection between the target group(s) and the dissemination channels. Sometimes this requires additional measures. For instance, if a project group makes a CD-Rom, a web site or a manual for target groups (like schools, networks or (potential) teachers), it must make sure that these target groups are indeed acquainted with and able to use these products. This can be done in several ways, e.g. by writing short articles in a widely read magazine, by sending short 'newsletters' to people belonging to the target group, by training people or by personally attracting the attention of the target group, e.g. in meetings or other collective assemblies.

It should also be kept in mind that dissemination should be more than simply dispatching information to ensure that projects exert an impact on the target groups. It also involves the attempt to share experience, to communicate results, to elicit a response and to propose a new and improved

way of working. One can only speak of a clear impact when the behaviour of the target group is modified, which is not easy to measure, however.

Dissemination, in this broader sense, demands a multi-lateral information flow which allows senders and recipients to learn from each other by acting on the information acquired.

For Comenius project groups this implies that, at least to a minimum, a two-way information exchange must be guaranteed, no matter which dissemination channel(s) are chosen.

**Example: dissemination channels**

**Transnational pilot networks**

Member States involved: ES, IT, DE, GB

This project focused on in-service training courses enabling primary school teachers to set up European Education projects and other networks looking at aspects of transnational cooperation between primary schools in the areas of language training, maths, geography, history, music, art, science and environmental awareness.

The project findings were disseminated in a variety of ways such as: the publishing of articles in educational journals, by local conferences and seminars in the partner countries, the publication of exemplification modules, the Internet, and an in-service teacher training in the partner countries. Moreover, a continued growth of expert networks could be achieved.



## 7 Effects of dissemination and dissemination barriers

If a project group disseminates the results of its project there is always some effect. However, the magnitude of the effect can vary. Two aspects are relevant here:

- the number of target groups that is being addressed.  
This number can vary depending on the objective of the dissemination initiatives. Even addressing one specific 'niche' as target group could be very effective.
- the number of persons in the target groups that can be addressed with the project results.  
A project group can define relatively easily how many persons visited a meeting or a conference, how many persons received books/manuals, CD-Roms or video-tapes. For the teachers courses the effectiveness of the dissemination is indicated quite well by the numbers of teachers attending the newly developed courses.

### **Example: effects of dissemination**

#### **Adapted Education for Gypsy children in cooperation with their parents.**

Member States involved: SE, NO, GB

The objectives of this project were to motivate Rom/Gypsy/Traveller children to attend school when they were stationary, for self study when they are travelling, to learn to read and write and to enable their parents to contact and keep in touch with the local school. In this project the dissemination consisted of: sending a video, a highly recommended resource that can inspire schools across Europe, to 20 schools working with Rom, to the partners involved in the project and to school authorities; delivering a teacher's manual directly to over 50 teachers working with Rom; and sending approximately 40 interim project reports to school authorities, to relevant other authorities and to the national Socrates offices.

The qualitative effectiveness of dissemination must also be taken into account. Comenius 2 projects concentrate on the development of new courses and/or new pedagogical measures. Dissemination results can be measured qualitatively by tracing the numbers of teachers who, in their own daily practice, adjust their way of operating towards the new approaches. The second indicator is how many pupils/students or marginalised youngsters are addressed by these teachers.

A more subjective indicator of effectiveness is when Comenius project partners themselves give an estimation of whether, by having contact with the target groups, they really had any influence on them. A five-point scale might be used here: very strong influence, strong influence, some influence, hardly any influence, no influence at all.

Finally, it is also possible for project groups to provide members of the target group(s) with a brief questionnaire in which these people can indicate to what degree the new approaches can modify or have modified their behaviour or their thinking. Here one can also use a scale ranging from very much to very little. Questionnaires can be usefully applied to investigate for the effects of teachers training, for example.

Disseminating project results in such a way that they really have an impact on the target group(s), is usually more difficult than one might expect. Several barriers can seriously block the transfer of the ideas from one group to another. A number of illustrations is presented below. Project partners

should consider potential dissemination barriers in advance to prevent them from negatively influencing the dissemination efforts.

#### Box 30

##### **Possible dissemination barriers, to be anticipated by a project group**

- insufficient quality of the project results
- project results are only important to a small target group
- insufficient money for using the more attractive dissemination channels
- insufficient expertise in the project group for disseminating project results in a professional way
- competitive relationships between groups or field players
- insufficient agreement about copyright or intellectual property rights
- agendas of the target groups are overloaded
- other innovations have been introduced recently
- resistance to change among the target groups because of existing power structures
- insufficient support from the National Agency
- no networks are operating in the area of concern
- existing national education structures
- national regulations conflict with the new initiatives

##### **Example: dissemination barriers**

###### **Interfaith education**

Member States involved: GB, IE, DK, NL

The project was geared towards the development of a handbook for bringing religious values of the major world faiths to the classroom and depended on the contributing authors of the contents of the handbook, who had to provide their copy and supporting materials on the time scale and in a format determined by the project editors.

The process of taking drafted text back and forth by fax and E-mail was very time consuming, partly due to inadequate technical facilities. There were also inevitable delays in designing and arriving at final printing. Deadlines for this, planned in the last months of 1997 and early 1998, were not met and the final printing of the handbook took place in late August 1998. Therefore, by the end of the project, the handbook had been published but not yet disseminated.

## 8 Evaluation of dissemination strategies

In section 3.3. 'Evaluation of the project's impact' information is already provided on the evaluation of dissemination strategies. Questions that can be taken as a guideline for evaluating the dissemination strategies, applied or to be applied in a Comenius project, are mentioned in Box 16. Indeed, evaluation of dissemination can be carried out *ex ante*, *ex post* and on an on-going, continuous basis:

- *ex ante*, mainly in the project proposal
- *ex post*, an assessment after the project activities have been finished
- on-going, to assess continuously during the project if the dissemination activities have the intended results and, if they don't, what has to be changed.

### **Example: evaluation of dissemination**

#### **Europa Ludens (a project fostering the idea of European citizenship through a role game)**

Member States involved: IT, ES, FR, PL

For dissemination purposes the partners in the project Europa Ludens have produced a teacher's manual, a students handbook, a Web site, a floppy disk and a CD-Rom.

Besides these activities, also a number of thematic seminars for teachers have been organised for dissemination purposes. These seminars have partly been evaluated with a tabulated questionnaire to be filled in by the participants. The evaluation has been partly carried out by external experts as observers of the seminars. In this way the group has been able to assess the effectiveness of its seminars as one element in its dissemination strategy.

Having worked its way through all the proposals and suggestions made in this handbook on evaluation and dissemination strategies for Comenius projects, a project group should be capable of writing a solid report on the way in which it has operated in the project with regard to evaluation and dissemination. It must be able to draw conclusions about what one has learnt from the evaluation activities. It should also be able to answer the question about whether the effort put into dissemination so far has been worth while and why. As a result of this new ideas, even for projects, will come up.

For new Comenius project participants this handbook should function as an important stimulus for elaborating good evaluation and dissemination strategies in their project proposals which then might then be rewarded because of their completeness.

