

School self-evaluation towards a European dimension, Giovanna Barzanò

This article describes the development of a Comenius project focused on school self-evaluation involving partners from four European countries and resulting in an international course which took place in Italy.

The planning, the implementation and the evaluation of the course are presented, clarifying the difficulties and the constraints met and the solutions adopted, the weak and the strong aspects as they emerged from the evaluation undertaken, as well as some recommendations for improvement.

In conclusion some general observations are made on the project as a whole.

1. THE PROJECT

1.1 The background

In recent years educational systems in European countries have been subject to changes on many fronts. Among the most crucial are the processes of decentralization\centralization of the school systems. In this context school self-evaluation is becoming more and more important: as a way of making schools accountable to external authorities or to the community and as way of improving the quality of the school.

It is particularly interesting to explore how educational systems are developing self-evaluation projects, which skills and instruments are used in different countries and how a proposal for an international in service training activity in this field can be constructed.

The project was aimed at designing and implementing a course for primary school headteachers with specific experience or interest in self-evaluation, which dealt with the following aspects:

- context and principles influencing external evaluation and self-evaluation programmes in the European educational context
- origins of school self-evaluation, definitions, approaches, methods and implementation issues
- the instruments used to gather information in school self-evaluation
- the use of the information gathered

Four partners participated in the development of the project, namely: the Directorate General for Primary Education of the Italian Ministry of Education (co-ordinator) represented by Giovanna Barzanò and Silvana Mosca-both inspectors, the Institute of Education of the University of London represented by Carol Donoughue-former HMI inspector, the University Pompeu Fabra of Barcelona represented by Francesc Pedrò y Garcia-professor of policy and social studies- and the University of Twente in the Netherlands represented by Jaap Scheerens-professor of organisation and educational management.¹

All the institutions had already co-operated in the one year European project EEDS (Evaluation of EDucational eStablishments) consisting of a comparative study on school self-evaluation in four countries; two of the institutions were involved in a similar study on innovative practices in school self-evaluation (INAP European project, INnovative APproaches to school evaluation).

The partners were therefore accustomed to working together from the beginning and had already developed a common methodology, as well as an effective way of sharing tasks.

1.2 The approach

The case studies undertaken in the EEDS project mentioned above as well as an analysis of the documentation from other projects make clear that the possibility of schools undertaking self-

¹ The project is administered with the support of Direzione Didattica di Romano di Lombardia (Enzo Asperti and Rosangela Baggio).

evaluation activities without support and training seems to be very limited. On the one hand schools might confront technical problems when preparing and administering their own purpose-made and tailor-made instruments, on the other an individual experience might prevent them from making comparisons which can be essential to understanding the objects of the analysis.

Following this assumption, attention was given to identifying a set of contents which could become the core of working sessions in the course, allowing participants to enhance their awareness of issues involved in self-evaluation programmes both in a theoretical and in a methodological and technical perspective.

As a first step the conceptual framework was discussed on the basis of materials produced within European projects in which partners had taken part such as the EEDS and the INAP projects. It was agreed to include in the theoretical aspects an international overview of external evaluation and self-evaluation and an analysis of basic concepts in self-evaluation. For both contents, documents were to be prepared to be distributed and key lectures were to be offered, followed by a guided discussion.

In order to develop the more practical parts of the training module it was decided to collect materials from different local projects implemented in European countries on which to base workshops, simulations, analysis. Five local projects were selected in four countries² and were analysed by means of a check list designed to capture and compare their main organisational characteristics. Headings considered included: project back-ground, basic statistics, initiator, external support, management, finance, role of teachers, contextual conditions, sets of instruments used. Instruments were also collected and analysed, in particular teachers' questionnaires which investigated from different perspectives teachers' perceptions of school functioning as well as didactic aspects.

The idea behind such an exercise was to have a series of meaningful examples and tools of analysis which could lead to an operationalization of some of the categories proposed with the theory.

For instance the EEDS project identified five categories of self-evaluation namely:

- a) tailor-made self evaluation of individual schools
- b) self evaluation which is part of an improvement programme which involves a number of schools
- c) school evaluation which is explicitly aimed at providing information to external constituencies as well as providing information for school improvement processes
- d) school self evaluation which serves internal and external purposes and is subject to meta-evaluation by inspectorates
- e) school self evaluation which is the spin-off of national or district level assessment programmes, where school results are fed back to individual schools.

Leaving apart the first, which was considered less interesting for the purposes of the course, the intention was to find examples in each of the others and then organise comparative workshops using the materials collected.

2. THE COURSE

2.1 First planning of the course

In the first year of the project the range of documents gathered -analysed and commented upon during plenary or sub-group meetings- had already led to a first draft of the course. In this first phase the conceptual framework, the contents, the materials and the kind of activities to be implemented were considered in a more theoretical perspective.

The real planning took place in the second year, when there was also a pilot initiative with a group of Italian headteachers organised with the support of the Italian Ministry of Education, aimed at validating the comprehensibility of contents selected and working out the kind of debate it could elicit.

During the following month, the course started to be seen in a more holistic perspective which had to be solidly grounded in theory, but also had to take into consideration various organisational issues, in order to create the best conditions for welcoming participants from

² See *School self-evaluation towards a European dimension*, pr.No41080-CP-1-IT-C31, final report year 1.

many different countries and providing them with an interesting international learning environment.

2.2 Activities

A crucial point concerned information and pre-course activities for participants.

Some background readings on self evaluation were selected aimed at allowing participants to start focusing on the topics they would be dealing with.

They were also asked to prepare a poster presenting their own experience so that it could be effectively discussed with colleagues.

A questionnaire was prepared to gather comparable information about participants' schools and participation in self-evaluation projects. Headings included: school characteristics such as number of pupils and staff, budget, social background, participants' career and responsibilities, experience and training in self-evaluation etc. Respondents were warned that the information provided was going to be disseminated among colleagues.

These three "tasks" were explained in a first contact message which was mailed some four months before the course together with some general information about the activities and the venue.

Reactions were quite prompt and allowed for a better definition of the target audience which appeared to be both qualified and motivated.

Participants' profiles were reported in a table and fed back to everyone in a second pre-course message together with more detailed information on logistics, timetable and activities.

Tourist information was also provided: the location selected -Viareggio, a well-known seaside resort in Tuscany out of season - allowed lot interesting trips which enhanced the quality of the learning atmosphere. It was considered important to offer everything which could contribute to the course, creating high expectations and fostering commitment.

As for the concrete planning of activities, it had to be revised because it would have been too rich and possibly impractical.

2.3 Shaping the units

The variety of participants' backgrounds and time constraints suggested that it was necessary to limit the topics and the assignments and to devote a lot of attention to materials in order to provide good documentation which could also be kept as a basis for consultation after the course. For instance the idea of referring to different country projects or case studies had to be abandoned, since it would have been of little value to headteachers from so many countries, working in very different contexts. Instead some instruments from a single project were presented to highlight the different possible uses of information gathered.

It was decided to have four lectures followed by workshops with a guided discussion supported by a check-list, one workshop with a simulation on data interpretation and a consortium were people had to report on the results of assignments accomplished during school visits. Group work was placed in between the units when necessary.

Each partner took care of the detailed organisation of a unit, in addition, the co-ordinators were in charge of all the logistics. All partners were expected to be present during the entire course, so that discussions and workshops could benefit from expert chairing.

One full day was left for school visits. These were aimed at providing an opportunity for field work in small groups with an assignment to interact with the headteachers and the senior staff to identify some significant needs of the school and to suggest a suitable self-evaluation activity. Participants were to report on their assignment in the final session of the course.

The schools had therefore to be selected carefully and prepared to deal with language diversity, to introduce themselves effectively and to be helpful for the purpose. In fact specific meetings were organised with the Italian headteachers who were also asked to prepare a school profile following some headings agreed and discussed with them.

Efforts were also invested in designing the evaluation of the course which was foreseen as a combination of the result of the rapporteur's report, participants' perceptions and comments collected by means of an open ended descriptive questionnaire and partners' observations.

Planning the course was therefore a demanding process: although contents and activities had already been roughly identified in the first phase, it was important to implement a pilot, to

prepare materials and instruments, to gather and process new information, to design the succession of events establishing priorities and links and to take care of the various organisational matters.

2.4 Implementation

The lectures and the main workshops

Lectures and workshops were organised in units which are hereafter summarised according to the following scheme:

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| UNIT 1 | Introduction to the course and presentation of course participants Giovanna Barzanò, discussion Francesc Pedrò |
| Methodology | Plenary and round table |
| Activities | Informative presentation of the course: objectives, contents and activities; key issues, rationale and proposed methods of working |
| Content | Organisational matters, the history of the course, the intended architecture of the course, dealing with the topic: background readings, lectures, simulations, guided discussion, field work, reports, exchange of information, course evaluation: means and contents. |
| Discussion and tasks | Presentation of participants: personal introduction and professional framework |
| Time | 3 ½ hours |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, course programme |
| UNIT 2 | Self evaluation and external evaluation: an international perspective Francesc Pedrò, discussion Carol Donoughue |
| Methodology | Plenary and round table |
| Activities | Lecture and guided discussion |
| Content | A description of the broader context and principles guiding self-evaluation and external evaluation programmes, aimed at providing suggestions for reflection. It covered the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical background • The popularity of evaluation • Why has evaluation become so fashionable? • Orientation and programmes • Opportunities and risks inherent in the self-evaluation culture • Future expectations |
| Discussion and tasks | Questions to the audience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and why did the emphasis on school self-evaluation begin in your country? • Is there any form of external evaluation? If so, specify who operates it and what kind of information is sent back to each school by the external evaluation body. • Is self-evaluation legally required? If so, specify what the requirements are • Is self-evaluation a common practice? |
| Time | 2 ½ hours |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, written text of the lecture, quick written questionnaire |
| Notes | Participants notes were collected, processed and summarised comparatively |
| UNIT 3 | School self evaluation : origins, definitions, approaches, methods and implementation issues Jaap Scheerens, discussion Carol Donoughue |
| Methodology | Plenary and round table |
| Activities | Lecture and guided discussion |
| Content | Definition of school self-evaluation on the basis of an analysis of the evaluation |

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| | <p>concept and the structural context of the school within educational systems. It covered the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Origins • External and internal evaluation • Evaluation of organisational effectiveness • An extended taxonomy of basic types of school evaluation approaches • Methods and instruments • Implementation issues |
| Discussion and tasks | <p>Questions to the audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which aspects of school self evaluation do you find important? • Which aspects would you like to develop further? • Mention opportunities and obstacles for implementing school self evaluation in your context |
| Time | 3 hours |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, written text of the lecture |

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| UNIT 4 | <p>Presentation of a range of instruments Giovanna Barzanò and Silvana Mosca, discussion FrancescPedrò</p> |
| Methodology | Plenary and round table |
| Activities | Lecture and debate |
| Content | <p>Practical examples supported by the theoretical background taken from an ongoing experience on school self-evaluation undertaken in Bergamo. The instruments presented were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire for parents • Questionnaire for pupils • Questionnaire on school functioning • Checklist for the monitoring of the process. <p>Each instrument was presented providing detailed information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims • Source • Adaptation • Data collection • Data gathered • Structure/content • Examples of questions • Use of information |
| Discussion and tasks | Questions concerning the examples presented |
| Time | 4 hours |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, photocopies |

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| UNIT 5 | <p>Data analysis and introduction to the group work Raimondo Bolletta³, discussion Carol Donoghue</p> |
| Methodology | Plenary and group work |
| Activities | Presentation and simulations in small groups |
| Content | <p>Presentation of data gathered by means of a parents' questionnaire used in the Italian project. Some data was presented related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • level of parental agreement with respect to school services • comparison between 3 school networks analysing the key factors emerged • "unhappy parents" in schools • families' socio-cultural status <p>Some suggestions for data reading and guidance on analysis and interpretation were offered by means of practical examples on data collected in Italian schools.</p> |
| Discussion | Simulation in groups: each group had a full set of real data from a school |

³ Raimondo Bolletta is a researcher from CEDE (Centro Europeo dell'Educazione – Frascati)

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| and tasks | participating in a self evaluation project. Using the data, groups were asked to define a school profile, underlining issues of concerns and proposing strategies for improvement. |
| Time | 4 hours and a half |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, brochure with sets of data |

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| UNIT 6 | Use of the information gathered Carol Donoughue, discussion Jaap Scheerens |
| Methodology | Plenary and round table |
| Activities | Lecture and debate |
| Content | When school self-evaluation is a part of the process of school improvement, two aspects have to be considered: how to collect information about what is happening but also what use will be made of the information once it has been collected. In fact, if the information is not used properly, the collection done previously become a waste of time and energy. A headteacher reported on the self-evaluation process in her own school. Some questions need to be considered carefully since the beginning of the process, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who receives the information which has been collected? • Who shares the information? • Who decides what to do next? • Does everybody agree about what has to be done? • How is the decision implemented? |
| Discussion and tasks | How do you know that the change has been effective? Questions concerning the examples presented |
| Time | 2 hours |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, written text of the lecture |

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| UNIT 7 | Presentation of key aspects of the Italian educational system Giovanna Barzanò and Silvana Mosca |
| Methodology | Plenary and group work |
| Activities | Presentation and group work |
| Content | Primary school in Italy: grades, timing, teachers, headteachers, school system reform, special national projects, general evaluation practice in primary education. |
| Discussion and tasks | When visiting the schools you can see yourself in the role of an evaluator engaged by the school to carry out school self evaluation Decide what aspect you would like to concentrate on, make a plan for observation including the choice of method and instruments suitable to the school context, draw some evaluative conclusions. Also decide on how to report the information to the rest of participants and on the feed back of what you have observed to the school itself |
| Time | 4 hours |
| Materials | Presentation in Power Point, booklet on the Italian school system, schools' profiles |
| Note | The file about schools to be visited was very useful as it provided helpful information for the preparation of the visit itself. It contained (for each of the seven schools visited): location of the visits (a map) and address, the programme of the day agreed with the host headteachers, the school profile and information on school functioning, the head teacher profile. Furthermore, participants met the hosting headteachers a couple of times before visiting their schools |

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| UNIT 8 | Field work in school visits Participants on their own |
| Methodology | Visit and group work |

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| Activities | Observations and interviews |
| Content | Analysis of the school context, collection of information, comparison of experiences |
| Discussion and tasks | Each group prepared a different project |
| Time | 7 hours |
| Materials | Schools documents |

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| UNIT 9 | Preparation for final "consortium" Participants on their own |
| Methodology | Group work |
| Activities | Discussion on the data collected |
| Content | School visit experience |
| Discussion and tasks | To prepare a report on the self-evaluation project to suggest in the school visited |
| Time | 4 hours |
| Materials | Notes |

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| UNIT 10 | Course evaluation Giovanna Barzanò and Francesc Pedrò |
| Methodology | Group work and individual work |
| Activities | Discussion |
| Content | The course experience: choice of the place and logistics, working with participants from other nationalities, lectures, group work, consideration on the experience as a whole, its impact and its benefits. |
| Discussion and tasks | To compare opinions and to fill in the form as feedback to project team and personal documentation. |
| Time | 1 ½ hours |
| Materials | Evaluation form |

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| UNIT 11 | Final "consortium" Jaap Scheerens, discussion Carol Donoghue |
| Methodology | Plenary chaired |
| Activities | Participants' presentation of school visits reports |
| Content | Report on observations and data collected during the visits |
| Discussion and tasks | To compare the results of the field work undertaken |
| Time | 2 ½ hours |
| Materials | Evaluation form |

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| UNIT 12 | Poster session Participants on their own |
| Methodology | Informal meetings of small groups |
| Activities | Presentation of experiences undertaken by participants in their countries |
| Content | Programmes' outlines, instruments, outcomes of self-evaluation |
| Discussion and tasks | Questions and answers |
| Time | Flexible appointments between participants at the end of the main sessions |
| Materials | Posters prepared by participants and displayed in the meeting room |

Work groups

Work groups were composed by the project team at the end of the first day of the course and progressively increased the relevance of their role within the development of the course, putting together people in accordance with the following criteria:

- * observation of groups spontaneously formed in informal occasions

- * different nationalities

- * different competencies in speaking English

The same groups were maintained for all the activities, including school visits. It was considered that staying in the same group could offer opportunities for a deeper level of discussion and understanding of each others' experience.

Anyway group work covered about half of the activities, the rest including round tables and plenary discussions where a broader exchange was possible.

Agenda, organisation and support

The course was held in the hotel where all the participants and the staff were accommodated on a full board basis. This avoided any waste of time and allowed for a precious flexibility.

A "creative agenda" was adopted, including six working hours and a half per day, in two tranches: 8.30-12.30 and 17.00-19.30. The long break at midday was intended to leave space for the various activities which were offered in the day light. These ranged from the beach to the bike to visits to interesting historical sites such as Pisa or Lucca, only half an hour by train from Viareggio. People could choose between an ordinary meal and a lunch bag to save time.

The quality of both the location and the accommodation and arrangements was a strategic choice which was indeed rewarded by the quality of participation, as it was generally observed in the evaluation: everybody was always very punctual and attentive, since the opportunities had enhanced their sense of duty and their motivation.

Choosing a holiday place in low season also gave the possibility of a precious contact with the Municipality and the Tourist Authority, who contributed in the organisation offering a complimentary trip, a dinner as well as interesting publications.

Another important aspect of the organisation was the investment in secretarial support (two secretaries were present) which meant availability of technology (computers, projectors), the possibility of preparing documents, grids, transparencies quickly, prompt answers to the emerging needs, efficiency, and good quality information.

3. THE EVALUATION OF THE COURSE

3.1 Participants' point of view

The evaluation form completed by participants

In order to capture participants' perceptions a descriptive methodology was chosen. A grid was set up with space available for comments under the following subheadings:

- a) A short description of the participant's experience of the course, which, together with a final question concerning "conclusions", was aimed at getting a first overall evaluation of the activity
- b) Observations and comments about the course and its organisation. This section included space for considerations of the organisation and logistics and of the different components of the module such as the international European dimension promoted by means of international comparisons, lectures, group work and school visits. Each subheading was split into two parts: positive aspects and weak aspects. There was then a specific request to mention negative aspects since it was considered that leaving an undefined space meant not reaching a sufficiently informative picture of what the perceptions were and what the possible improvements would have been.
- c) Specific questions about the experience as a whole i.e. which were the most effective elements of the course, possible follow up and suggestions for a future version of the same course.
- d) Brief conclusion.

The estimated time to complete the 4 pages questionnaire was 1½ hours. The questionnaire was handed out at the end of the last morning of the course, before the final plenary and all

the 21 participants completed the task although some said they would have liked more time. In some cases descriptions were extremely full; others were more schematic although always quite informative.

All the forms were immediately photocopied and the originals were returned to the participants for their own record.

The holistic evaluation

Participants' impressions and comments on the course as a whole were very positive and gave the organisers clear proof of the success of the course.

Most frequent comments were:

- the usefulness of the experience which provided a good balance between theory and practice;
- opportunities for sharing the experience with other participants from different countries, broadening personal and national context and providing suggestions for "possibly avoiding the pitfalls discovered by others";
- excellent organisation which had paid attention to every detail, providing pre-course materials, and a varied timetable of course activities, cultural visits and suggestions for the use of free time.

There were some weak aspects or suggestions for improvement to be taken into consideration:

- more time for discussions and group work
- more detailed information about the instruments presented as a way to gather data for the self-evaluation process
- more computers to use for group activities

There was general agreement about which were the positive aspects of the course. There was much less agreement on the less effective aspects.

Logistics and organisation

The questionnaire asked participants to comment on the positive and negative aspects of the choice of the venue for the course and on the organisational matters.

All participants appreciated the location of the course, which is close to many places of interest.

The daily timetable (8.30 to 12:30, 17.00 to 19.30) and the long break between morning and afternoon (12.30 to 17.00) were welcomed and considered an excellent idea as participants had enough time to organise their own activities.

Only 2 out of 21 participants mentioned two weak aspects, i.e. the main lecture area was thought to be poorly lit and that there was background noise which sometimes disturbed the audience because the secretarial staff was working in another part of the same room.

There were very positive comments about the technical support and the availability of different kinds of resources (photocopies, transparencies, wall charts, even a small library with selected publications on self evaluation as well as on tourist aspects). This allowed participants to make the best use of their learning time since all "practical" concerns were avoided. It was very much appreciated that the staff contributed to the preparation of participants' handouts developed from activities. At the end of the course the amount of documentation produced and distributed was impressive, "heavy to take home" as someone observed.

The European dimension

The participants comprised 21 head teachers (or senior staff) from 12 different European countries providing an immediate and rich European forum.

The first aspect of developing the European dimension was to share a common terminology and to be able to understand each other in spite of the various meanings attributed to the same words in different national contexts.

The second aspect was the intercultural learning which arose from talking about other systems and other countries' experiences in self-evaluation.

The European dimension was developed also by means of personal relationships and plans for future contacts or partnerships in European projects.

The strong benefit derived from being part of the international group was underlined by many participants.

Professional learning and follow up

All participants underlined some kind of learning both in the case of not very experienced head teachers or head teachers already facing self-evaluation issues in their schools. Furthermore, every participant said that they had learned something concrete which would help them when they were back in their own schools.

Some significant comments were: "the experience was useful for planning and targeting our next steps", "I understood the necessity of careful planning and timing", "it was a useful reflection on what we are doing", "important strategies to further implement school self evaluation have been reinforced such as the need to focus on a limited issue, checking the completion of the process, the risk of tackling results in inadequate process, weak or suspect conclusions", "ready to move forwards".

Suggestions for improvement

Such a particular experience produces results which cannot always to be taken for granted as they rely on the quality of the contents and organisation as well as on the participants' contribution and "openness" towards each other. It is logical to look for suggestions for improvement mainly based on participants' perceptions and not only on the organisers' points of view.

A part from the continuous exchange of ideas among staff and participants, the evaluation grid was found very useful because it required participants to report on concrete issues, asking for both good and weak aspects. The feedback from participants was very clear.

Main issues to be taken into account are:

a) The language of the course

This was pointed out by some participants although not as a significant aspect. The few participants without a suitable language competence did not fully contribute to group discussions despite the fact that their comprehension was facilitated by the lecturers' handouts which were provided in advance.

Even if it was made clear that the working language was English, it was observed that "a satisfactory competence in English" meant quite different levels across the countries.

b) The international framework

Quite a few participants stressed the need for greater attention to be paid to the comparative framework.

One participant said that "The problem is that we have very similar words to describe the national school systems, but they have different meanings".

Participants themselves offered useful information for the comparative framework but the different sizes of national groups played an important role in this issue. Even if a checklist was provided, for future courses it would be useful to use official sources for enhancing the development of a comparative framework. Unfortunately there is a lack of those materials.

c) School visits

School visits were a very positive experience for all the participants.

Nevertheless the programme related to school visits was considered too ambitious. Having to visit schools, meet teachers and head teachers and also be given a guided tour of the surroundings did not allow participants to complete the task which was to find out about self-evaluation initiatives in the school.

3.2 Staff's evaluation of the course

General comments

Generally speaking, the course responded well to the expectations both of the trainers and of the participants. Overall, it is clear that the main benefit resulting from participating in the course was the opportunity to meet other headteachers, to know about their particular experiences and to perceive personally to what extent all European education systems are confronted with a similar range of problems and with a limited number of strategies and solutions in this field. The framework of self-evaluation offered an important opportunity to enhance the European exchange.

Participants left the course with a sound theoretical knowledge about the principles of school self-evaluation and a panoramic view of the instruments and tools which can be used. The contribution made by the Italian schools and their headteachers was relevant. They offered

their particular experience as a test bed for the course participants and they did it with a positive attitude, learning-oriented.

At least part of the success came from the excellent infrastructure and services provided by the local organisers and by the particular spirit that the co-ordinating team of the course brought with them.

Recommendations for future editions

a) Organisation and Logistics

The hotel, the choice of Viareggio, the premises, the outings, all were excellent. Participants really enjoyed being able to visit other towns easily and they enjoyed being by the sea and being able to rent a bicycle and explore the surrounding. The quality of logistics offered an important value added to the learning atmosphere.

b) The theoretical dimension

The course went from theory to practice and there seemed to be enough time for everything. However the presentation both of the contexts of self-evaluation and of the different models and approaches was probably more theoretical than needed for the purpose of the course.

The content of the lectures should be maintained, although topics such as statistics and theoretical issues of self evaluation should be simplified. Also the after lectures guided discussions worked well as they offered a rich European forum for comparisons. Lectures promoted a strong interaction within the group. However discussions could offer a suitable opportunity for raising some theoretical issues. It would be meaningful to end lectures, after participants' contributions, with structured summaries reflecting individual experiences as well as theory and research results.

c) The practical dimension

The practical dimension always plays an important role in this kind of course but it is difficult to find the right activities given the various constraints. For instance, school visits aroused a lot of interest and were a high point of the course but as an instructive event they were less effective.

In fact, the practical exercise consisting in a visit with a task to be accomplished was good for it gave the participants the opportunity to interact quickly with actual teachers and headteachers in their natural working environment. However, it was not probably the best way to help the participants to feel embedded in a self-evaluation process. The exercise gave more the feeling of the Italian primary school system than the opportunity to be really engaged in the operation of a self-evaluation process. For a future occasion, a narrower and better structured assignment should be given to participants.

d) The didactic methodology

In future courses the co-ordinating team could invest more time in designing a didactic methodology that goes beyond the combination or alternation of theoretical lectures and practical exercises. A possible idea would be to think of a case study related to the school to be visited.

The visits should be used to give each team of participants the feeling of an actual Italian primary school where the case is supposed to have occurred. The preparation of such a case-study needs time and resources, but it would be worth the effort if the team succeeds in introducing the right amount of information and issues regarding the political and social context of evaluation, models and alternative approaches to self-evaluation, tools and strategies.

Also practical exercises, such as the simulation activities using data gathered by means of self evaluation instruments, could be better designed and more detailed instructions should be given.

e) Course materials

These were probably one of the most valuable outcomes of the course, not only as course documentation but also as background readings for further professional development. They should be made accessible to a wider audience.

f) Evaluation of the course

The grids worked well. Participants filled them in accurately providing a helpful feed back on the course. However it might be a good idea to have a short session on the last day when participants tell each other whether what they have learned on the course will make them change or start some new initiatives. Writing about it does not have the same effect because they don't have the same opportunity to discuss and learn from others.

g) Follow up

In order to have more information about the course and its possible influence on the professional activities of participants, a questionnaire has been prepared to be filled in by participants six-eight months after the course to find out what participants have done in the intervening time. Information obtained will be summarised and sent to participants.

4. SOME OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project "School Self Evaluation Towards a European Dimension" is still in the final year of its implementation and a further version of the training module will take place this year. The evaluation of the project is therefore still in progress. It takes into consideration various aspects which it is now only possible to sketch:

- The initiation of the project. The fact that the project was originated by a previous research project was very positive since the most important aspects of the conceptual framework had already been clarified and all the partners were interested in developing dissemination strategies and were accustomed to working together.
- Roles of the partners in the development of the project. A clear division of tasks was organised from the beginning. This was made easier by the characteristics of the team which was composed of both researchers and practitioners all interested in the interaction between them.
- The development of activities. Although the basic theoretical principles of the project were quite clear from the beginning, the project developed through progressive adjustments influenced by the interaction between the partners and the different contexts where activities were piloted in the field, particularly Italy and England where the practitioners belonging to the team were based. The discussion of these PILOTS was important in the planning of the course.
- The actors involved. The partners were helped by the participation of other actors in different contexts. Those responsible for different European projects on school self-evaluation were contacted and schools were visited to observe field activities. They provided materials as well as observations on the draft plans for the course. This allowed for a first dissemination of the project's products.
- Organisation and administration. Organisation was taken care of by the Italian coordinators. All organisational and administrative issues were discussed in plenary meetings but the practical tasks deriving from the planning were accomplished centrally. This was considered quite effective for the development of the work. Every year a plenary meeting was organised as well as some subgroup meetings. Written communication by e-mail was fundamental.
- The materials produced. Various kind of materials were produced including:
 - theoretical documents which were progressively refined in order to create a set of background readings on school self evaluation. Reactions gathered during pilots were taken into consideration so that they could reflect a good balance between rigour and practical realism;
 - grids and check lists to promote the discussion of crucial topics in the different contexts of dissemination, to undertake field observation, to present programmes and tools;
 - collection of real data with guidelines to be used for simulation activities;

- collection of documentation from different project including instruments;
- questionnaires and evaluation tools;
- bibliographical references
- Use of the results and dissemination. Although the courses provided the main opportunities for the dissemination, a range of other opportunities arose from the pilots and the different contacts. In the final phase of the project publications are foreseen as well as a cd-rom. An international seminar is also foreseen with key informants both from the practical and academic world.
- Evaluation. The evaluation of the project is mainly based on partners self-observations. A detailed record of activities, implemented topic discussed is kept by the co-ordinators. Written documentation has a crucial role, all meetings are minuted and grids are often circulated among partners to gather their perceptions on the development of the project.