Developing Key Competences Through eTwinning Projects

Key competences is a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes that will ensure success in an individual's personal and professional lives. The need to develop key competences is a major goal of education nowadays. The key competences can be developed through eTwinning Plus projects. First of all, eTwinning Plus is a framework for cooperation between schools. The main objective of eTwinning Plus programme is to help to establish partnerships among European schools and develop various forms of collaboration among the schools using information and communication technologies (ICT). eTwinning Plus is an innovative way of teaching that is aimed at improving the quality of education. It develops ICT skills, communication skills, usually in a foreign language and collaboration. It also addresses European dimension and, last but not least, it realizes curriculum content.

Teachers and students of Kovel City Gymnasia have been registered in eTwinning Plus programme since 2014. They use the simplest forms of online communication such as emails or chats. They also use more advanced tools such as online bulletin boards, "on which students post questions and ideas for discussion", online video discussions using tools such as Skype or Google Talk. Creating their own web pages and blogs is another way of collaboration and sharing information. Moreover, other ICT activities include producing a text using word processors, e.g. Microsoft Word, making a presentation using for example Microsoft PowerPoint, or using digital cameras to take photographs or films. In order to help teachers and students to communicate and work on the project, an environment for online collaboration has been created. TwinSpace, as it is called, is assigned to the teachers whose pupils work on the project. Thus the teachers are

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administers of their TwinSpace, post articles written by their pupils and make use of tools such as forum, mailbox, bulletin board and chat for communication with their partner schools.

eTwinning collaboration among Kovel City Gymnasia and partner schools schools is realized using eTwinning projects that are carried out within any subject. The choice of the project topic is always in compliance with national curricula in all countries participating in the project.

Project methodology, which is fundamental in eTwinning Plus projects helps to enhance the quality of learning and teaching by emphasizing students' own experience during the educational process. Students actively participate in solving a problem, the teacher being rather an assistant to provide help. Identification of the problem arises from students' practical needs and addresses questions that students are concerned with. Also, project method is a way of opening schools towards the student, the world and learning. There are a lot of advantages of using project methodology in teaching. Firstly, projects attempt to meet "the child's needs and interests" such as the need for experiencing new things and learning. Secondly, projects tackle real and actual problems that are described in the terms of "here and now". Thirdly, projects build bridges across the curriculum and allow students to look at problems from many points of view. Fourthly, it is mainly students who plan and carry out the tasks in the project. Thus they manage and regulate their own learning. Fifthly, projects are product oriented and therefore the products of learning have to be well documented and presented to the public. Sixthly, projects rely heavily on teamwork and cooperation. Students cooperate within one or more classes, schools and countries. Lastly, projects can come up with solutions to acute problems. Moreover, work on projects brings participants in and out of school together.

A project is usually carried out in several steps. The first step is called "purposing" and it is described as the impulse for project work given either by pupils or teachers. During the next phase, which is called

"planning", pupils set project objectives, identify key questions to be answered or topics to be discussed, plan activities, assign tasks and roles and design a timetable for the work. The teacher monitors, motivates and provides pupils with help if needed. Then comes "executing". In this phase, pupils work on the project according to the plan and the teacher again monitors pupils' progress towards achieving the objectives.

Lastly, both pupils and the teachers evaluate the project execution and results, think of other ways of solving the problem and present their work to other participants. This stage is called "judging".

If we look at projects dealing with the foreign language learning, or to be more specific, with the English language learning, we will discover other major features of the project method. In the first place, project work "helps to integrate the foreign language into the network of the learner's own communicative competence". When solving a problem in a foreign language context, learners need to use knowledge of the foreign language as well as knowledge of their own world. Connecting these two spheres enables them to communicate in a purposeful way, because they use the language in order to fulfil a project task that they identify with.

Usually, students suggest the problem to be dealt with in the project and decide on ways of resolving the problem. In addition, project work makes communication between the learner's world and the English-speaking world much easier. Learning a foreign language means not only learning about other cultures, but also making other people aware of one's own culture. Also, project work provides a good opportunity for integrating the four basic skills - speaking, listening, reading, writing. For example, the "purposing" stage requires more speaking and listening, during the following stages students combine the four skills simultaneously. Students perform interviews and thus employ speaking and listening skills, at the same time they need to take notes, and read for some background information such as preprepared questions or some brochure.

There are eight stages of development of a language project:

1. "Stimulus", during which students discuss and comment on the initial idea.

2. "Definition of the project objective". Students discuss, negotiate, suggest and argue in order to define the project objective and to plan the project.

3. "Practice of language skills" is a stage when students practise and rehearse the language they need or they feel they need in order to carry out the project.

4. "Design of written materials" includes reading and writing questionnaires, grids, tables etc. needed for data collection or some other work on the project.

5. "Group activities". Students work in groups, pairs or individually in order to gather information (interviews, surveys).

6. "Collating information" means analysis, explanation and discussion of the collected data.

7. "Organization of materials". During this stage, students develop the end product of the project.

8. "Final presentation" is the final stage, during which students present their end product.

It is obvious that the contribution of the project method to the development of the key competences is manifold. If we start with the competence to learn, then students may develop them by choosing the project topic and by identifying the problem they will deal with. Also, if they plan the project work, they think of activities and tasks they should undertake and methods and strategies they should employ in order to pursue the project goals, they may develop their competence to learn. Moreover, data collection and analysis and their use for further work on the project, successful completion of tasks and dealing with problems that arise make learners responsible for their learning, providing them with skills of managing their own learning. Similarly, project method

develops the competence to solve problems, because problems form the core of the majority of projects. If learners carry out projects, they must understand what the problem is, why it is here and what ways of solving it there are. Furthermore, as projects should meet learners' needs and interests, learners should be more motivated to resolve the problems and less discouraged to give up if they do not succeed immediately. Project work also provides learners with opportunities to present their results, compare different ways of producing them and thus defend their opinions. In order to present their results, learners might be asked to introduce their main points in oral or written form. Such a production or reception of the key points, usually followed by discussion, contributes to the development of their communicative competence. Of course, the same is very true about group work or pair work when learners use the language in order to establish good working and personal relationships. As a result, they also learn group work and pair work rules and realize that pleasant atmosphere in the team is essential in order to succeed in solving a problem or accomplishing a task. Thus they develop their social and personal competence.

To sum up, project methodology appears to be a good method of developing most of the key competences. It is also important to point out that those key competences developed through projects do not develop separately but rather as an interconnected whole. One activity, or in this context one stage of a project, may develop more key competences at the same time.

Description of the key competences

1. Communicative competence

At the end of basic education the learner is able to:

1.1 express one's thoughts and opinions in a logical order, concisely and clearly in both oral and written form.

1.2 listen to and to understand other people's messages and to react appropriately to them, to take part in discussion, to argue for one's opinion in a suitable and convincing way.

1.3 understand different types of texts, recordings, visual materials, common gestures, sounds and other means of communication, to think about them, to react to them and to use them in a creative way in order to enhance one's own development and active participation in society.

1.4 use information and communication technology in order to communicate effectively with other people.

1.5 use the acquired communication skills in order to build relationships that are essential to live and cooperate with other people. Ability to select and use effective methods and strategies in order to learn, to plan and organize one's own learning; willingness to learn throughout one's life.

2. Personal and social competence

At the end of basic education the learner is able to:

2.1 work efficiently as a part of a team, to participate in establishing teamwork rules and to cooperate with teachers, to improve the quality of teamwork after having accepted or recognized the new role in the team.

2.2 partake in creating a pleasant atmosphere in the team, to strengthen good interpersonal relationships by showing respect and courtesy to other people and to offer help or ask for help when needed.

2.3 contribute to a group discussion as well as to a debate of the whole class, to understand the need to cooperate effectively when solving a problem, to appreciate other people's experience, to respect different points of view and to learn from what other people think and say.

2.4 create a positive image of oneself that increases one's self-confidence and promotes one's development, to control one's behaviour in order to reach self-respect and feel satisfaction.

3. Competence to learn

At the end of basic education the learner is able to:

3.1 select and use effective methods and strategies in order to learn, to plan and organize one's own learning; willingness to leam throughout one's life.

3.2 seek and process information, to evaluate the information and to apply the information to learning and everyday life.

3.3 understand and use general terms and symbols, to show relations between facts and to interpret the facts with respect to different educational domains, to create a more complex view on cultural, social, natural and mathematical phenomena.

3.4 experiment independently, to analyse the experiment results and to draw conclusions for their future usage.

3.5 develop the sense of learning and to recognize the aim of learning, to form a positive relationship to learning, to judge one's own progress and to identify one's learning difficulties and to plan ways of overcoming the difficulties and of improving one's learning.

4. Competence to solve problems

At the end of basic education the learner is able to:

4.1 perceive and recognize problems at school as well as outside of school, to think about the problems and their causes, to look for and plan the ways of solving the problems by using one's own judgement and experience.

4.2 look for information which is needed in order to solve the problem and to analyse it, to use the acquired knowledge and skills in

order to propose different solutions to the problem, to persist in finding the final solution no matter what the difficulties are.

4.3 solve the problem independently and to choose appropriate ways of solving it, to use logical, mathematical and empirical methods when solving the problem.

4.4 verify the correctness of the solutions, to apply the effective and tested ways to solve a new, similar problem, to observe one's own progress in problem-solving.

4.5 apply critical thinking and to arrive at rational decisions, to defend the decisions, to accept one's responsibility for the decisions, to evaluate the results of one's decisions.

5. Civic competence

At the end of basic education the learner is able to:

5.1 respect opinions and values of others, to develop empathy for other people's situations, to deny cruel treatment, to take on the moral duty to condemn and fight any acts of violence.

5.2 understand basic principles that underlie the law and social norms, knowledge of one's rights and duties at and outside of school.

5.3 decide and act according to what the situation is, to provide help within one's capabilities, to act responsibly in emergencies and in situations causing harm to health and life.

5.4 respect, protect and appreciate our traditions and cultural and historical heritage, to take a positive attitude towards works of art, to be aware of culture and creativity, to participate actively in sports and cultural activities.

5.5 understand ecological context and environmental problems, to acknowledge the need for healthy environment, to behave in order to maintain health and to sustain economic growth.

An overview of the development of the key competences through eTwinning Plus programme

Activity the learner undertakes	Competence developed
Discussing the topic of the project and how the project will be carried out.	Communicative competence
Identifying with the problems and questions of the project, which ensures greater likelihood of not giving up solving the problem. Producing and applying ideas.	Competence to solve problems
Choosing a suitable topic of projects, e.g. the approach to ecological problems in both countries or pupil's approach to a healthy life style.	Civic competence
Choosing suitable topics of projects, e.g. comparison of entrepreneurship possibilities in participating countries or running a fictitious travel agency.	Occupational competence
Identifying the project objectives. Planning of the project (activities, methods, strategies, timetable).	Competence to learn
Recognizing and understanding the problem behind a project. Suggesting and planning ways of solving the problem.	Competence to solve problems
Writing emails, using chats, participating in videoconferencing in order to communicate and perform tasks.	Communicative competence

Data and information collection from different sources (e.g. the Internet, newspapers, emails, photographs, films).	
Working on the project in real or virtual groups in order to achieve common goals.	Social and personal competence
Data collection and analysis and their use or nonuse for further work on the project. Completing a task successfully, and dealing with problems that are likely to arise while carrying out the task.	Competence to learn
Carrying tasks on his/her own, such as writing emails. Being provided the opportunity to carry out some tasks (e.g. email writing) several times and thus being allowed to learn from the mistakes and successes he/she has made in the particular activity. Being responsible for his/her own learning and also for establishing contact with pupils from abroad. Collecting and analysing data and information relevant to the task objective.	Competence to solve problems
Carrying out the tasks in a creative way.	Civic competence
Presenting the solution of a problem or a task to other pupils and teachers involved in the project, both in an oral and	Communicative competence

written form and in a foreign language.	
Comparing one's own project results to the results of pupils from the partner schools, and learning from those results.	Competence to learn
Comparing the home country to other countries in the EU, e.g. comparing lifestyles of pupils and drawing conclusions from it. Learning about different cultures, traditions and trying to teach other people about one's own culture and traditions.	Civic competence
Analysing the results of the work on an international project in terms of its efficiency, quality etc.	Occupational competence
Working in groups, cooperating with people of different nationalities, cultures and languages. Identifying and observing the rules of communication, both in international and national environment, if there is any difference.	Communicative competence
Combining formal and informal learning, which is motivating and fun and creates a pleasant atmosphere. Working on the project in real or virtual groups in order to achieve common goals.	Social and personal competence

Writing emails, using chats, participating in videoconferencing in order to establish contacts and make friends. Participating in the project and thus being given the sense of being an important part of something as big and exciting as an eTwinning project is.	
Exploring a new way of learning, its benefits, which is motivating for him/her in order to engage in lifelong learning.	Competence to learn
Collaboration on an international level, learning about different countries and cultures. Dealing with European dimension.	Civic
Using computers (desktop computers, laptops, accessory devices), software (operating systems, word processors, media players, web competence browsers etc.), digital cameras etc.	Occupational competence

eTwinning Plus projects in Kovel City Gymnasia

While the previous chapter has dealt with theoretical background, the aim of this chapter is to provide examples of practice. This chapter will introduce eTwinning Plus projects that have been realised in collaboration of Kovel City Gymnasia and its partner schools from the European countries.

Project "Christmas around Europe"

Languages: English, Spanish, Italian, Polish

Age range: from 11 to 15

Subjects: Art, Foreign Languages

Countries: Spain, Poland, Italy, Ukraine (Kovel City Gymnasia)

Links to project outcomes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UHlMIBY0ok,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0QcH_OxuxE,

https://www.kizoa.com/slideshow-maker/d81443241kP273765971o1/christmas-cards.

Project objecives:

- ➢ practice to express wishes in English (practising the foreign language in real-life situations),
- ➢ exposure to different languages (wishes were also written in the individual students' mother tongues),
- ➢ learning about Christmas customs and traditions in different European countries,
- ➢ practising artistic skills through making Christmas cards,
- ➢ making friends around Europe.

   Project description:

   Students worked in groups to prepare videos in which they introduced themselves, sang Ukrainian Christmas carol, wished "Merry Christmas". Project method was used to involve students into the process of learning more about traditions of celebrating Christmas in Poland and other European countries. Brainstorming and mindmapping were used while disscussing the ideas of the project. IC technologies were used to do activities during the project. The video about Ukrainian Christmas cards was created with the help of KIZOA, other videos were uploaded in youtube.

Project "European Union Game"

Languages: English, French, Spanish, Polish

Age range: from 13 to 15

Subjects: Art, Foreign Languages

Countries: Spain, Poland, France, Ukraine (Kovel City Gymnasia)

Project objecives:

> ➢ to increase pupils' knowledge about the European Union with a game,
> ➢ to achieve a broader view and understanding of the issues of the EU,
> ➢ to get to know each other,
> ➢ to have a better understanding of European counterparts and as a result to be encouraged to travel throughout Europe to meet them,
> ➢ to express own ideas, share opinions,
> ➢ to improve ICT skills,
> ➢ to take initiatives, to work in groups.

Project description:

The project dealt with the characteristics of the European Union. The aim was to allow pupils to discover the main characteristics of each participating country, to have an insight into their features, and to know what the impact of the EU is in their own country. In the end, students created a board game about the EU.

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Project "The portrait of the tree" -"Portret drzewa"

Languages: English, French, Polish

Age range: from 10 to 13

Subjects: Art, Foreign Languages

Countries: Poland, France, Ukraine (Kovel City Gymnasia)

Links to project outcomes:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03cOKuJxmpo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GiYkA3N9io

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5HE6_HpSwI

Project objecives:

> ➢ to learn and perform 2 poems, fairy tales or pieces of music concerning trees.
> ➢ to improve writing and speaking skills in English,
> ➢ to get to know symbols of ecology, names of the trees and create The Dictionary of Ecology,
> ➢ to encourage students to interpret their feelings about pieces of art and prepare an exhibition, drawings, posters concerning the topic of the project.
> ➢ to improve ICT skills,
> ➢ to learn how to work individually and in groups.

Project description:

The project was referred to children and their interests in rhymes, fairy tales and pieces of music. The main aim of this project was to bring pupils in the world of poetry and music and enlarge students' knowledge concerning ecology and species of trees. They got to know 2 poems, 2 fairy tales and 2 pieces of music concerning trees (the most popular lyrics for children in their country). They narrated, read and listened to them. Students made some presentations in the form of posters, drawings or dramas. Pupils also created „ A Dictionary of Ecology" – vocabulary concerning ecology. During the project teachers shared ideas and experience.

Project "Short adventure story in my town"

Languages: English, French, Polish

Age range: from 11 to 14

Subjects: Art, Foreign Languages

Countries: Poland, France, Ukraine (Kovel City Gymnasia)

Links to project outcomes:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBd9y2362AY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYngmBzNtDg

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaE35pdlxOg

Project objecives:

- to practice writing in English,
- to learn about the story of the cities in different European countries,
- to develop students' imagination,
- to practice vocabulary and past tenses,
- to learn how work in groups cooperatively.

Project description:

The idea of the project was to make a book with a collection of short, adventure stories about the town the students live. Each school wrote a short story about their city/town in English. The story consisted of about 200-300 words and some pictures, which were drawn by the students or downloaded. Some stories had real facts like buildings, dates or some people. Other stories were invented stories, which could happen in that city/town. Students could write any kind of their adventure story: a love story, a crime story, fantasy, thriller, etc. In the end students made a short quiz, a crossword or a a game about each place.
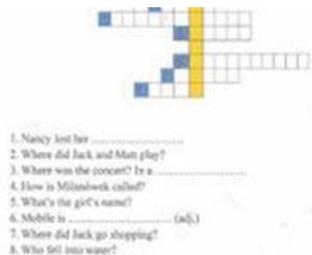
EL teachers and students of Kovel City Gymnasia have been awarded with National and European Quality Labels for their contribution in eTwinning Plus programme.

Conclusion

Participation in eTwinning Plus projects is an efficient way of developing the key competences and provides an excellent framework for foreign language teaching and learning. The projects offer great opportunities for presentation, practice and revision of various language structures and sets of vocabulary. The projects invite the pupils to use more than one language skills within one activity, often integrating all the skills. The pupils are engaged in writing and reading tasks, which are apparent from frequent communication by emails. Group work or pair work offer opportunities for the speaking and listening practice. What is more, language work is done in authentic settings of using the language for real communication with people who do not speak the same mother tongue. English teachers at Kovel City Gymnasia help pupils to develop the key competences when teaching through eTwinning Plus programme. The activities designed in eTwinning Plus project are efficient, motivating and fun for the pupils and contribute to the development of the key competences.

Participation in eTwinning Plus programme provides other benefits for schools. For students, it is an appealing and motivating method of learning, which makes them experience learning in almost real-life conditions of communication among their peers from different countries, using a foreign language in order to communicate. For teachers, it is an effective way of learning new teaching methods from

European colleagues. What is more, any international collaboration, eTwinning Plus including, gives the school good publicity on the local, national and international levels, which also carries prestige.

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