Primary School network meeting in Linz, 7 and 8 April 2005

Participants

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Wednesday 6 April
Welcome dinner hosted by Veritas Verlag

Thursday 7 April

09.00-12.30: The use of ICT in Primary School, presentations, discussion on the situation of using ICT in Primary school in the different countries.

Manfred Meraner, Veritas Verlag, welcomed the participants to Linz and after a short presentation of all participants, he explained the economic and cultural background for the region Oberösterreich, where Linz is situated. Next he described the educational system of Austria, pointing out that children start school at the age of 6 years, followed by 4 years of primary school. The state organises the distribution of schoolbooks, allowing €37.06 per pupil. As for ICT in primary it is not an individual subject in primary schools in Austria. However, there is a small market for edutainment programmes and for autonomous training software (without specific references to schoolbooks). There are better market opportunities for training software accompanying schoolbooks as cd-roms enclosed in the books for individual use. An important Austrian feature is the so called SbX approach where the Ministry of Education offers on-line material for free use for schools and pupils. In general ICT products cover 6% of the annual turnover of Veritas Verlag.

Dace Rudzite, Zvaigzne Publishers, explained that in Latvia ICT is only compulsory from grade 5. However, Zvaigzne has published a series of booklets introducing computer graphics for primary schools. The four booklets cover Paintbrush, Paint, Microsoft Word Art, and Photoshop.

Natalia Uvarova, Prosveshcheniye Publishers, stated that in Russia ICT is not compulsory in primary school. But the company has published a series of books for grades 2, 3 and 4, introducing the concepts of ICT. These booklets present logical thinking, ICT technology knowledge via printed
materials without explicit use of a computer. The Ministry of Education has required that max. 15 minutes per day may be spent by pupils in front of a computer.

Taina Shingler, Otava Publishing Company, described the situation of ICT in Finnish primary schools: ICT is not a compulsory subject, although the schools are very well equipped with computers all over the country. There are computers in every classroom, and dedicated computer classrooms is normal, even in kindergarten there are computer lessons. Otava Publishing Company offers a wide range of ICT applications, exercises, articles etc. on-line for free, as support materials for their books. It is clear that there is hardly profit in producing and publishing ICT applications. Taina Shingler showed some on-line exercises for Swedish and English from the Otava web site.

Kadri Haljamaa, Koolibri Publishers, explained that in Estonia there is no special curriculum for ICT in primary, but that ICT is integrated into the existing curriculum for individual subjects. For example ICT is integrated in topics like safety in the traffic. Some schools offer optional lessons with computers, although it is not required. Kadri Haljamaa also presented the so called Tiger Leap foundation which has the aim to provide all schools in Estonia with computer and ICT applications. Among the outcomes of this initiative she mentioned a free web site for teachers to exchange PowerPoint presentations, work sheets, exercises etc.

Rita Oliveira, Texto Editores, described the ICT situation in Portugal by pointing out that access to computers is required for pupils from grade 5 to grade 9, but for for primary schools. In Portugal there are more than 9,000 primary schools of which some are very small. Texto Editores offers no specific ICT materials for primary. However, in several textbooks there are ideas for pupils on how to find information on the internet.

Barbara Hein-Sunzenauer, Veritas Verlag, pointed out that Veritas Verlag has published numerous materials for ICT in primary, not only the PC-FIT series which introduces pupils to using the computer in general, but also a series of cd-roms with exercises, tasks, games etc. Barbara Hein-Sunzenauer then presented some highly relevant applications for ICT in primary. ’Achtung, fertig, Clic’ is for grades 1 to 4 which concentrates on Math, German language and elementary Science, all of them referring to existing schoolbooks. The accompanying cd-roms offer lots of exercises, puzzles, fill in’s, listen and write etc. One important feature is that the pupils can work on their own at home (maybe together with their parents) using the cd-roms.

12.30-14.00: Lunch

14.00-18.00: Early foreign language learning in primary school

Preben Späth, EEPG Central Office, presented the research on early foreign language learning in a European perspective. He explained the different theories on pros and cons about early language learning and the prerequisites to make this approach successful. Among the topics leading to interesting discussions were on the one hand whether there should be special attention to the different attitudes to learning (e.g. foreign languages) in boys and girls, on the other hand the implications of Howard Gardner’s theory of the multiple intelligences for the teaching and learning of foreign languages. He summarised the findings of several expert groups and the recommendations to be taken into account when introducing early foreign language learning (please click here to see the presentation).
Kerstin Kauffold, Veritas Verlag, told that foreign language learning in Austria is offered from grade 1 (6 years old) since 1998. On most schools the language is English, but other languages are offered as well (Hungarian, Croatian, Czech, Slovak, Italian, and French). In year 1 and 2 the pupils only learn listening and speaking, there are no specific language lessons, but the foreign language is integrated into the other lessons. In year 3 and 4 foreign language is offered one lesson per week, including reading and writing skills. Veritas Verlag has published a series of materials for English in primary, including the course ‘Hello’ which comprises a book, an audio cd, video and flash cards. Furthermore they have published ‘Small Talk’ which includes teachers’ resource book and audio cd with songs and rhymes.

Rita Oliveira, Texto Editores, pointed out that in Portugal English as a foreign language starts at the age of 9 in some private primary schools. But beginning in 2005 English will be introduced as a compulsory subject in 20% of all primary schools from grade 1 with two lessons per week. By 2009 all schools should introduce English as compulsory from grade 1.

Kadri Haljamaa, Koolibri Publishers, described the situation of foreign language learning in Estonia where English is the most popular first language as in most countries. The details of the Estonian approach can be investigated in the presentation (please click here to see the presentation).

Taina Shingler, Otava Publishing Company, gave a detailed presentation of the four books series ’Surprise’ for English as a foreign language. The series includes one book for each of the grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 (please click here to see the presentation).

Natalia Uvarova, Prosveshcheniye Publishers, first pointed out that in Russia foreign language learning is not compulsory in primary school. However, experiments with a foreign language in this age group is going on now. From grade 4 (age group 9/10 years) foreign language learning is compulsory (with English as the most popular choice, followed by German, French and Spanish).

Dace Rudzite, Zvaigzne Publishers, described the situation in Latvia where the first foreign language is compulsory from grade 3. The second foreign language is compulsory in secondary school. She presented the series ’Start the challenge’ which includes books for the grades 3 through 9. This series offers textbooks, teacher’s guide, games book, work book and audio cassettes. Zvaigzne has also published a book for English to be used in kindergarten (with inspiration for parents to start teaching their children English).

Evening: Dinner in the ”Pöstlingbergschlössl”, hosted by Veritas Verlag

Friday 8 April

09.00-12.00: Layout and structure of books and materials for primary school in general (presentations and discussions).

Rita Oliveira, Texto Editores, gave a detailed presentation of the package ’Amiguinhos’ (Little Friends) which includes a series of books that are organised in 9 units. They give good examples of
the ideas behind the layout of the pages, the use of colours and space, the problem of stereotypes etc. (please click here to see the presentation).

Kadri Haljamaa, Koolibri Publishers, described the many detailed requirements layed down by the Ministry of Education in Estonia concerning educational books. These requirements include the maximum weight of books, the number of pages, the words per sentence, the size of the letters for primary and secondary, the line spacing etc. On the one hand these detailed requirements seem very restrictive, on the other hand they provide good guidance for the educational publishers, since in Estonia (as in many other countries) the schoolbooks have be approved by the state. It is clear that such regulations have great impact on the layout and structure of schoolbooks.

Taina Shingler, Otava Publishing Company, gave a vivid presentation of the ideas behind the layout of the book series ’Surprise’. Each book has four units, each of which is characterised by one colour. On each page speech bubbles contain the minimum vocabulary to be learnt while the extra text items are for quick learners. All new words are represented in the pictures on each page. After each chapter there is a revision page. In general the illustrations show a high degree of humour in order to motivate the young learners. Finally she presented the textbook ’So ein Zufall’ for German in primary which had just received a gold award for its illustrations and layout.

Natalia Uvarova, Prosveshcheniye Publishers, first stated that in Russia 75% of the national curriculum for primary schools are defined by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health whereas the remaining 25% are defined locally (in the more than 80 regions of the Russian Federation). As on several other countries there are detailed regulations and requirements for the structure and layout of educational books. The content is also defined by the Ministry of Education.

Dace Rudzite, Zvaigzne Publishers, described the layout of the ’ABECE’ book for learning the mother tongue with parents and grandparents as the target group (kindergarten children is the target). Secondly Dace Rudzite showed the textbook ’Maza Zile’ for primary (book for reading and writing the mother tongue). Finally she presented the layout of a new book for Natural Science for grade 1. Here the most important information is presented in speech bubbles, the chapters are concentrated on topics like life, nature, environment and health.

On Saturday (9 April) Veritas Verlag organised a cultural bustrip in the region, where the participants spent the whole day visiting very interesting places according to the following plan:


On behalf of all participants I sincerely wish to thank the team from Veritas Verlag for helping to organise the meeting and make it a very successful event.

11th April 2005
Preben Spåth