



Report on the 2nd Project Managers Online Discussion Event

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1. Introduction

The primary objective of the DESIRE project is to identify how new project results in science education can reach teachers and schools more efficiently. The online discussion events (ODE) of DESIRE are used to facilitate the sharing of experiences about dissemination between stakeholders in science and math education. The ODEs have the purpose of collecting qualitative data for the DESIRE Project.

This report is a summary of the second project managers Online Discussion Event which took place in the period 7-9 November 2012 and was moderated by Marisa Hernández, researcher in Science Education at the Centre for Research in Science and Mathematics Education (CRECIM), in the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona, Spain.

During the three day event project managers were invited to discuss which European and national science education project results they have knowledge of. The issue of impact in educational practice or effectiveness of dissemination methods was also discussed. The following sections contain summaries of the discussed themes each of the three days and the outcome of the discussions.

2. Day 1

The first day had a focus on the STEM education projects about which the participating project managers had had some information or involvement in order to share experiences on dissemination strategies of certain projects.

This first day had a moderate level of participation (21 posts) and the contributions of participants were very valuable.

Most of the European projects that the participants mentioned were funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission. Some examples are Traces, Nanoyou, S-Team, CoReflect and Fibonacci. The participants explained their experiences as coordinators or as target audiences of these projects.

As a project coordinator, one of the participants mentioned that it would be necessary to document experiences well and to present them in a flexible way in order to spread good practice.

“In general, my idea of dissemination is summarized as follows: We can spread good practice if the experiences are well documented and presented in a flexible way in order to generate adaptive processes. The results should be stimuli in their environment to generate new initiatives that take account of previous research. For example, to the recommendations of TRACES we are now involving the Italian schools to understand together how the reflections on experiences can be the engine to generate effective learning activities, new ways of interacting with colleagues and researchers, etc.”

Regarding the issue of flexibility or adaptability of projects' outcome pointed out by one of the participants, he added the following comment:

“Obviously it is not easy to share a model to encourage the development of new initiatives that relate to the experiences made in the field activities in a previous project. For example, if we refer to the training courses that have already been tested successfully, the key point is how to facilitate the re-appropriation by teachers and other stakeholders. The aim should not be to give recipes but to put people in a position to learn from past experiences”

This participant even provided some good examples of formats that would facilitate the adaptation of project results for the purposes of teacher training, such as:

- *“Case studies, which allows framing the experience carried out with attention to the context and boundary conditions. The emphasis should be on the evaluation of both the learning and the process.*
- *Resources such as learning materials for students, scripts for teachers with a detailed description of how the materials were designed and used, movies of educational activities, audio and video interviews, or analysis of interesting situations in the conduct of activities.”*

As part of the target audience, some project managers explained that they got to know some of the aforementioned projects because they had been involved in previous projects addressed to a similar topic or because these projects matched their interests as teacher trainers or teachers.

“I have heard of the project S-Team [...] via the contact with the researchers involved. I have gone to their website in order to consult some of the documents. I have done the same regarding other FP6 projects, such as Mind the Gap and Parcel, also CoReflect... Some of them have been very interesting for me as researcher and teacher trainer”

The most common dissemination channels of these projects that the participants highlighted are online courses, face-to-face presentations, website, and informal contact with colleagues. The project results that were appreciated as the most interesting or useful are: training packages/materials, immediate and usable classroom materials, and resources on scientific content accompanied by some support.

“Nanoyou produced a lot of material, some of which is of great quality (the film, the role playing game), and easy to use”

“Material that is of good quality, user-friendly and easily understandable for the “common person” is the ace up the sleeve in my opinion. I believe training events and training packages together, followed by constant contact with, and feedback from, peers and trainers would work best. In my opinion, there is nothing more immediate and usable than having at your fingertips documents to rely on, and similarly interested people guided by good facilitators at an arm (or computer)'s distance. Obviously, many of the others can have their (additional) place”

The participating project managers also pointed out some difficulties that they can foresee regarding certain dissemination plans.

“Difficulties can lay in the organization [of training events], the selection of trainees, the language(s), the recognition of the trainings”

“I have found very innovative the TV documentary [as a dissemination channel], as something that I have not heard before in other projects. However, sometimes this sort of materials is mostly a sort of propaganda with a very poor effect on disseminating project results or ideas”

Finally, one of the project managers raised a key question: what do we mean by dissemination of project results? She distinguished three purposes of dissemination: (1) dissemination of the project itself to make it known by others; (2) dissemination of project outcomes to potential beneficiaries; or (3) creation of a network or infrastructure for large scale dissemination. This participant also raised the question of whether all the projects should develop all these three facets of dissemination:

“Of course, in most projects all three dissemination types are used and sometimes combined (for instance, when disseminating teaching and learning materials also the project is disseminated and depending on how they are distributed, a dissemination infrastructure could be created) but it is important, at least for me, to think about them separately so that you realize what dissemination strategies you are using for each purpose. In my case, most of the projects in which I have participated were devoted to the second type of dissemination, making the project rather invisible and not concentrating enough effort in thinking of developing an infrastructure to spread results and resources... From my viewpoint, this was not problematic in itself, as some projects must be more focused on creating something to be further disseminated than on dissemination...but it is problematic if these projects are not followed by other projects that exploit further its results.”

3. Day 2

During the second day of this event, project managers were asked how to evaluate the dissemination plans of a certain project. A number of different qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure the impact of a project's dissemination plan according to its initial goals and targets were listed and project managers were invited to discuss which ones they find more relevant and more challenging to measure.

One of the participants shared her experience recognizing that *“targets set in dissemination/ communication plans are mainly quantitative ones: website statistics, involvement of more teachers/schools after the end of the project, papers published and cited”*. This participant considered that *“other qualitative indicators (e.g. achievement, enthusiasm of participants, changes in individuals' understanding of the project outcomes, change in subjective views from individuals, positive changes in approaches to teaching) are usually set as overall indicators for the project results beyond the dissemination in itself”*.

Regarding this viewpoint, the moderator also discussed the need for evaluating not only how many stakeholders are reached using a certain dissemination strategy (as a quantitative indicator) but also how understandable and usable it is perceived by them (as qualitative ones).

Another participant considers that *“involvement of more teachers/schools after the project has ended would be the most relevant indicator whereas participants' enthusiasm would be the most challenging to measure”*.

4. Day 3

The third day discussion was focused on the needs of each target audience concerning dissemination. Project managers were invited to exchange ideas about how to make project results not only available but also more understandable and usable to help each target audience apply these results in practice efficiently.

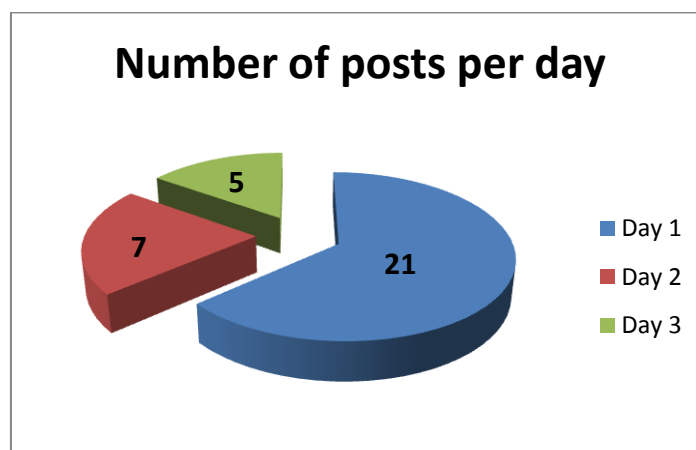
Only one participant was involved in this thread and expressed his position that teachers' needs (for instance) should be taken into account before starting a project since any funded project is addressed to specific stakeholders' needs or problems.

“I'd say that teachers' needs and dissemination activities are two separate things. Needs' finding should be at the very beginning of the project cycle, dissemination at the end. If your project doesn't address teachers' needs then you can have the most brilliant dissemination plan that reaches every single teacher in Europe, but teachers simply won't use your project results.”

The moderator briefly discussed this contribution considering that although projects' outcomes addressed teachers' needs, the dissemination plan could not take into account aspects such as teachers' favourite channels or characteristics (language, format, length, duration, cost, etc) that would facilitate their engagement and understanding. According to this viewpoint, there would be some specific needs to take into account when talking about dissemination strategies.

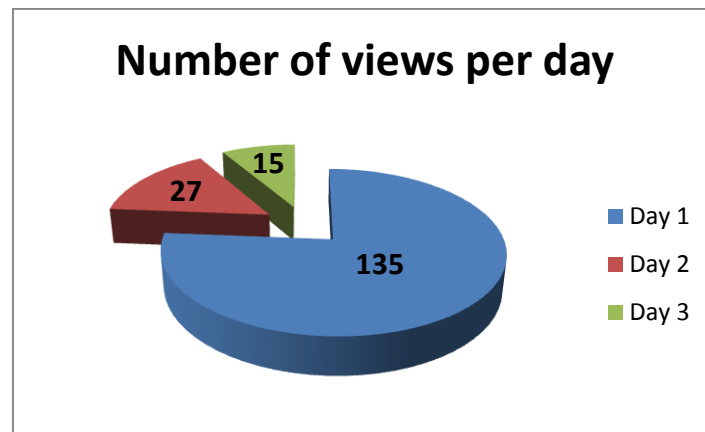
5. Participation

Along the three days event, there were 33 posts. The distribution of the posts per day is shown in the next figure:



As shown, the first day had the highest number of posts and this number decreased day by day. The statistics from this second project managers ODE show that the event had a low participation level from which we can drag some useful ideas and experiences of the participants that can contribute to the identification of better dissemination practices in future STEM projects.

As shown in the next figure, there were also several views of each category (Day 1, Day 2, Day 3):



The low amount of participation compared to the involvement during the first Online Discussion Event for Project Managers might be interpreted as the result of:

- Time constraints, as some invited project managers apologized for not attending the event due to busy agendas on those dates.
- Technical difficulties that arose during the 1st day of the event, since the participants had some problems to register and sign in the Desire portal.

6. Conclusion

It was possible to determine the experience of the participating project managers about some of the threads discussed and the quality of their posts was very good. We consider that the participation level was quite low and thus, we would like to rethink the format of this event to adapt it to the participants' needs or interests and to the purposes of the Desire project.