

Project meeting and training for teacher in Lublin (15-19 November 2021)



In November, 2021 I had the opportunity to travel to Lublin, Poland with my colleague, Révész Enkratisz for a teacher training held in the framework of Erasmus+ project „Learn sustainability, live sustainability”. Although the extraordinary circumstances caused by covid made it difficult to organize, our visit to I Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Stanisława Staszica w Lublinie was successful and extremely exciting.

On November 16th, the school's principal, Stanislaw Ston, greeted the teachers from four countries (Italy, Germany, Greece, Hungary). He introduced school life and a bit of history for us. The school was founded in 1586, and though the school's location has changed during centuries, it has provided the same quality of education. It has been operating under its current name since 1961, with about 700 students and 60 teachers working together. It is difficult to get into the 18th-ranked school in the national high school ranking. Perhaps one explanation is that there has been a special course here for some time, the so-called IB class, which gives its graduates an international diploma. This course prepares students for their undergraduate years, as they study all subjects in English in the second and third years.

We also had the opportunity to attend these special classes to see how broad this knowledge is and in what ways the students' creative / critical mindset is developing in this type of classes.

The geography class, which I was able to attend with my colleagues, dealt with energy sources. The class was divided into two parts, one group (16 people) attended this geography lesson, the others had a history lesson at this time. Teacher Kasia Dobek used a smart board to process the curriculum with the students. Most of them used tablets and laptops to take notes. There was no textbook, their only source was their atlas in the lesson. In this way, everyone took notes on the information they considered important.



The topic included the pros and cons of renewable and fossil fuels. The students first gathered ideas in pairs and then discussed the most important facts together. During the class, there were examples mentioned from Poland, such as the Iron Mountains (Góry Izerskie),

where mining destroyed the landscape and threatened organic farming in the area. The other big topic was the pros and cons of hydropowers, which was processed in a similar way. The students did not have a problem with language use and were characterized by an open attitude and appropriate subject knowledge throughout.

The next lesson was a history class that began with a couple of students demonstrating what they would do during the school year as part of the course. There is a guy who is researching the residents of the Lublin concentration camp based on their age, origin, nationality, occupation, and so on. Another student has worked on Trotsky's life, a third one has found himself a literary topic. These large essays are activities related to the examination system of the IB classes, which they have to complete after several months of research work.



The subject of the class we attended was the European Cold War period from 1953 to 1961. The previously given reading was processed on the basis of the given questions concerning the events in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. At the same time, the role of the USA, the Korean War, the domino theory were also discussed. Pupils were given the reading online and had to solve a thirty-question task at home.



It was very interesting for me to see how naturally English is used by students to describe historical events and although the lesson took place frontally, the thought-provoking questions on the part of the teacher made the lesson exciting.

In the third lesson, we were introduced to a new subject called Theory of Knowledge. This class involved a mixed group of students from different classes. An English language source was also used here: *Theory of Knowledge for IB Diploma (CUP)*. First, a quick review was conducted at the beginning of the lesson, discussing the difference between the human and natural sciences. Some basic concepts were then explained, such as observer effect, ethics, psychology, measurement, and so on. Two important examples have been mentioned which are very relevant today in the field of human sciences. One is migration, which was actually taught about two years ago, but the events that have just taken place on the Belarusian-Polish border have given importance to the subject. The Milgram experiment, conducted in the U.S. in the 1960s, examined human behaviour from the perspective of obedience to power. In it, they researched how far (performing an

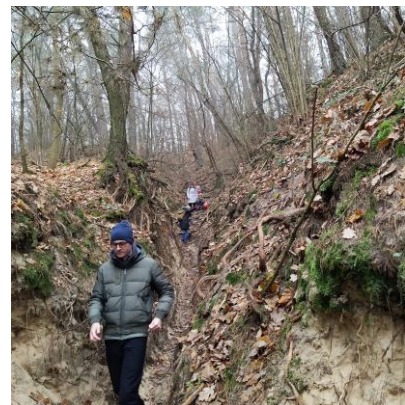
electric shock) people can go against each other when an external power demands it from them.

The whole lesson was a kind of conversation, the students were free to add their reading experiences or refer back to what they had learned before. The teacher moderated the lesson rather than checking or passing on knowledge.

Basically, this subject supports the development of critical thinking, which in today's world where people are dumped by various sources of information, and it is difficult to choose neutral or unbiased positions, could be crucial. As we have learned from the teachers, the students do not understand at first why this subject is important to them, but as they move forward with the topics and another side of the world opens for them, they are much more enthusiastic about it.

The meeting in Lublin was also a touching history lesson for us. We were able to learn about the local history as part of a sightseeing tour, and we were able to face the horrors of the extermination camp in Nazi Germany at a memorial site in the Majdanek concentration camp. We could see that the history of the city's Jewish population still preoccupied locals today. The "Grodzka Gate - NN Theater" Center is a cultural institution based in Lublin. It is housed in the Grodzka Gate also known as the Jewish Gate that historically used to be a passage from the Christian to the Jewish part of the city. In its activities the Center focuses on issues of cultural heritage. During our visit, we were able to take a look at the archives (including personal information, photos, etc.) that the "Gate" staff mapped in search of residents of the Jewish Quarter.

As part of our trip to Kazimierz-Dolny, geography teacher Ms Dobek took us to an area rich in natural attractions on the banks of the Vistula. We had the chance to walk through the gully called "Norowy Dół". During the tour, she explained how she integrates the curriculum into a similar outing she does with the kids each year. Students arrive in the area with carefully prepared worksheets, where they have to take measurements with the help of a map,



study stones, answer questions, and document the completed tasks with photos. He admits that most students visit this place for the first time when they are on a school trip. Most of the time they only visit the historic part of the city (the market square, the synagogue museum, the Church of John the Baptist) with their parents, but the natural attraction, which is a few minutes away from the center, is not known for them.

In addition to learning about school life, local history and natural beauties, we held mini conferences to continue the project. On 16th, in the first half of the meeting, we talked about the fact that sustainability is an increasingly urgent problem, the protection of our environment and individual involvement are essential in the protection of our planet. As teachers, we also have an important role to play in providing our students with an approach and practical guidance on nature conservation.



Unfortunately, we all agreed that in the current pandemic situation, it is difficult to schedule meetings in advance. As the trip to Italy and Greece with the students may not be realized, we considered it essential to develop a Plan B. The Montessori Gymnasium (Cologne) had already prepared this, and in Lublin the details had to be clarified and the roles of partner schools had to be decided. Regarding the online education, we all found that several students had difficulty processing the curriculum, that more students lost their motivation, and that their lack of social connections also affected their performance. With this in mind, it was suggested that we come up with an activity that requires a personal presence from the students, favours pair work or group work, but at the same time is enjoyable for them. We could agree that each of the partner schools should select a theme in the name of sustainability and organize a portfolio of different activities around it, and then send the completed product to one of the partner schools by post. The portfolio may include short films, photo material, board games, interviews, installations, books, etc. The point is for students to present a topic in several forms, and then send them to teach their foreign peers about that topic. We have chosen the theme of 'sustainable living', which promotes the ways we can reduce carbon footprint in households effectively.

For the second time, after everyone received the proof of participation, we made further clarifications on how we can orient and motivate students in any online period that may be introduced due to the pandemic. We all agreed that communication through eTwinning has been still essential, as we have been forced to deviate from the original plan from last year. Live discussions on this platform provide an opportunity to clarify issues and plan further activities.

Overall, we had a useful meeting with my colleague, which certainly contributed to our professional development as well as the success of the project.

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