

The ColourWorld School Programme: From ideas to implementation

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Those aware of the operation of Voluntary Service Overseas' (VSO) Global Educators' Network in the United Kingdom have possibly become familiar with the patterns of making use of the human resource of returned volunteers (RVs) in a school environment. Although it is always very flattering when one compares the work of the PLANET Foundation (PLANET) in Hungary to that of VSO in the UK, it truly encompasses a similar mission in both developed and developing countries.

PLANET is a non-profit organisation located in Budapest with the aim of helping people find voluntary work worldwide and promoting not-for-profit ideals. Its primary objective is to function as a stepping-stone for participation in the non-profit sector abroad. However, we are also dedicated to helping volunteers from abroad come to Hungary to volunteer. The vision of PLANET is to build a strong and responsible community through international volunteer experience. Therefore, the establishment of the ColourWorld School Programme (CWSP) was by no means a far cry from the goals that PLANET pinned down in 2000.

The programme stems from a number of sporadic requests from primary and secondary school teachers who asked for volunteer-based 'story-telling' lecture-like classes or activities. After surveying the returned volunteers' intention for participation in such activities, PLANET established the programme in the first term of 2005. The goal of the ColourWorld School Programme became to present the state and culture of developing countries to the teachers and students of schools in Hungary and engage them in related activities. Moreover, it aims at introducing issues of international development (ID) to students and teachers and the difference these make to people's lives. We reach this aim through using the knowledge and first-hand experience that PLANET Club volunteers gained while they were on service abroad.

Before the first volunteer could enter schools a substantial amount of preparatory work needed to take place in order to assist schools with finding the most suitable ColourWorld RVs for classroom work. After scanning the profile of work they have undertaken we selected a list of themes to which most classroom programmes could match:

- life of indigenous people, changing cultures

- culture/lifestyle
- education and youth welfare
- natural disasters, rehabilitation and rebuilding homes and communities
- community development
- fair trade, economy of developing countries
- environmental conservation and protection
- non-profit management.

At the beginning the programme was predominantly supported by great media coverage in Hungary and PLANET also advertised the programme in several relevant venues and forums of national public education institutes. For schools applying for ColourWorld we recommend RV facilitators according to the subject taught and the interests of teachers and students. It is still rather difficult to find a good time and date around the CWSP as it had to match the school activity timing, the volunteers and the project coordinator's schedule who observes the lesson.

Fortunately enough, after the first term the ColourWorld School Programme has already won a grant from the Hungarian International Development Agency (HUN-IDA) so the second term programmes (first term of 2005/2006) came under the support of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

An important feature of the programme is that not only do PLANET Club members have the opportunity to teach in schools, but it is also possible for those who worked/work for other volunteer sending and hosting organisations to do so. This feature is important as even a wider range of RVs can be introduced to students. This inclusivity also fuels stronger partnerships between PLANET and other Hungarian non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) for example Caritas Hungary. In the first term of school year 2005/2006 20 activities took place in schools. Another factor of the CSWP is that it is not capital city centred, as ColourWorld facilitators visit as many schools outside Budapest as in it.

All throughout the programme special emphasis is placed on sharing the activities with disadvantaged students, for example facilitators taught classes in a Mental Health Vocational School in Budapest, which is a well-known secondary school for integrating drop-out young people. In this place we managed to bring about the most successful CWSP whereby we constructed one part of a school project on Discovering Differences between countries. The students have chosen three countries which they needed to compare and learn about in the context of culture, environment and development: Australia, Hungary and Uganda. A PLANET RV provided two one and half hour lessons on 'Uganda today'. The students learnt about Uganda from very

different perspectives from the RV who had spent a whole year teaching primary school pupils in a village - this gave an incentive to students to try and compare children's lives as well as learn about country profiles in the three countries. The programme further "coloured" the project by bringing a PLANET member to the classroom who originally came from Uganda but now lives in Budapest. He taught greetings, songs, dances and superstitions to students. Other interesting ColourWorld lessons in the past were: talking about a matriarchal community on a Thai island; a middle term recovery project from the tsunami on Sri Lanka; animal rescue in Costa Rica and South Asia; teaching in Cameroon; rainforest protection in Ecuador and child slavery in the world in 2006.

Although we could sum up this programme as a success story evaluation is strongly taken into consideration. Two surveys were constructed and sent out after the programme had taken place to measure the effectiveness of the programme and the satisfaction of teachers and students and their thoughts for improvement. In summary, we learnt from their feedback that the programme was seen by teachers as useful and forward-looking and they recommend it to continue. 90 % of them plan to incorporate ColourWorld in their teaching in the future; 83 % of them believe that the activity was inherently associated with the subject or the school programme (school day, cultural programme). All of them reported that they still build upon the knowledge in their lessons that students gained in the ColourWorld activity. According to the survey they reckon that the following integral parts of sustainability education were demonstrated in the lesson:

- education for democracy and peace 75%
- health Education 66%
- environmental Education 92%
- social participation and community involvement 92%
- voluntary work, individual contribution to community development 92%
- sustainable development 75%
- protection of values, traditions and culture 100%.

From the student survey it seems that 85 % of the students found the CWSP useful and enjoyable. The most interesting top themes are: 1. Animal rescue and conservation, 2. Catastrophes and their rehabilitation 3. Remote places and cultures in the world. Among all continents and regions they want to hear more about South-America. As they want to know how they can contribute effectively 67% wanted to find out more about the European Voluntary Service (EVS).

The findings of the questionnaires show that more training should be

provided to RVs on current curriculum issues and practical interactive teaching and methodological issues. Some PLANET Club members have competencies in pedagogy or have taught during their overseas work. However, some do not have pedagogic experience and for them it is important to learn skills relevant to teaching. The global education training that was provided at the beginning of last school term (October, 2005) must be continued in order to keep the teaching programme relevant to school requirements.

PLANET plans to continue the ColourWorld School Programme in 2006. The Budapest Foundation for Development in Public Education secured the programme financially for the 2nd term of 2006. Although ColourWorld themes can be integrated into biology, geography, history, philosophy and other lessons in primary and secondary education the programme could be effectively complemented with an HIV/AIDS programme. RVs naturally speak different languages and this was used in French, English and Italian lessons to exemplify that language learning is no way a problem in learning about ID. Another article could take up the initiatives of ColourWorld venues when foreign volunteers teach in Hungarian schools as the programme becomes ever more popular.

Bibliography and References

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