

FROM QUALITY TO EXCELLENCE

(MODEL FOR INCREASING LITERACY LEVEL)

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1. Excellence and personal growth

Changes in the social environment impose a revolutionary impact on a human being as an individual (the same is true for organizations, countries). Changes are complex therefore our responses must be complex, too. It is not enough only to respond to certain changes, sometimes we must cause them (to be innovative!) and be consequently in charge of constant development – personal, organizational, social.

1.1. How do changes influence a human being as an individual?

Gabrijelčič says that human being is a generic creature who is always searching for new boundaries, yearning for unknown. He also explains that we must take into consideration one's rational and subconscious behavior. The author emphasizes the importance of virtue and worth being interwoven into man's valuable system and subconscious, having a strong and long lasting effect on man's function.¹

1.2. School excellence in connection with business excellence

The model of perfection EFQM is based on the presumption that it is possible to achieve excellent results of employees and society through the leadership which is functioning as the motive power of successful politics as well as through strategies of partnerships, sources and processes.²

There are many effective approaches when it comes to managing the quality control, encouraging creativity and initiating constant improvements. The EFQM model of perfection was chosen because of its possibility to be transferred in the field of school work.³ By using it, the school gains the possibility to evaluate its work, clearly defines its advantages and areas which need to be improved. It also defines measuring instruments and usage practicability which can be used for simultaneous evaluation. It is a practical tool which helps school employees to establish a measuring and evaluating system which is used to measure which points have been reached on the path from quality to excellence.

2. Brežice Elementary School; its politics of constant growth and the model of perfection

In the framework of everything that was already said and being able to comprehend the excellence, where is absolutely urgent to know and to use the already existent sources and work conditions which also contain searching of new paths of knowledge and experience, Brežice Elementary School designed a model called "From Quality to Excellence". Each year the model is further developed and upgraded and includes more and more pupils and teachers from other institutions and other external co-workers. Our basic idea stays the same – we want to mould a good man with excellent knowledge. We have set ourselves a pretentious goal, which including a clear vision, demands many concrete activities in various fields of work and life.

The basic idea of the project is to elaborate and initiate the model for increasing the literacy level called "From quality to excellence" which presents the upgraded model of the "The path from quality to excellence" project which has already been carried out by Brežice Elementary School for several years. The model was set up in the year 2001/2002. In the last five years it has been upgraded and innovated. The model of perfection combines different strategies including long life learning, competency approach, literacy development and the use of the European model of perfection as an instrument for appraisal and self-evaluation. It was set up in the context of strategic documents needed on the path of reshaping the whole European Union strategy while connecting and increasing the efficiency system of upbringing and education.

The model of perfection was summed up in the integrity of various detached methods ranging from long life learning, competency approach, and literacy development using ICT tools in mother tongue and foreign languages in the field of science, ethics and society, music, geography, art... Much time is devoted to caring about one's health – movement, nutrition, mutual relationships, associating with coevals in Slovenia and abroad, getting to know their characteristics, culture. We have developed a model which includes co-operation of pupils, teachers, parents, members of the local community, members of Slovenian School Internet Network, members of Comenius... The model has integrated a concept of changing and growing. It enables us to follow the path of constant organizing and character development – to follow the path of constant change, enrichment and adjustment.

The model for increasing the literacy level called »From quality to excellence« is bringing to life the idea of using long life learning in the field of literacy development as a main instrument of modern civilization. Teachers, pupils and others involved in the project are enabled to develop those competences which present the foundation for putting long life learning principles and encouragement of literacy development into force, not only as a cultural instrument, but in the sense of pointing out the meaning of literacy as an instrument for enabling people to enter the world of relationships and knowledge.

The model develops literacy as it exists in all its complex structure (development of readership, development of moral, functional, naturalistic, media and informational literacy including literacy of active citizenship...), which contributes to better individual functionality in society and development of one's capability of creating one's own image. It is known that deficits in this area do not only represent so called knowledge gaps but the absence of fundamental instrument of one's soul, cultural, social and personal growth.

Literacy as such is going to function as a key criterion to establish the project quality while the European model of perfection is to be used for evaluation and self-evaluation.

The model emphasizes the competency development needed for general improvement of various aspects of literacy that are essential for independent acquisition of knowledge and creative problem solving. Schools involved in this project are using innovatory didactic approaches and contemporary IKT technologies such as internet, e-mail, internet library, while exterior co-workers are being involved in development of our reading, communicational, computer, naturalistic, moral and media literacy among pupils enrolled in second to ninth grade. IKT technologies offer pupils various possibilities of learning which contribute to amplifying the level of motivation.

The model "From quality to excellence" is used to solve problems associated with the contents and organizing abilities, it strives for literacy improvement, learning and teaching efficiency, ensures the quality improvement and aims towards perfection.

Brežice Elementary School is aware of its mission that is why we have decided to approach upbringing and education using 3 H: head – heart – hands; 7E: economy – efficiency – ecology – ethics – esthetics – excellence). Our approach is long lasting and proactive. This means that the already existent quality elements have been upgraded, linked together and intertwined with the "school culture". Development and planning are our school's strategies of constant growth and are used directly in connection with our school's organizational culture and management. We believe that without our own learning and changing, we will not be able to achieve already set goals.

The teaching methods are diverted towards:

- Learning in a sense that one's knowledge is constantly being upgraded (pupils, teachers, parents...),
- quality knowledge,
- contemporary methods supported by new technologies,
- construction of one's own values and viewpoints,
- Co-operational culture (among different participant groups on various levels and among schools).

Initiation of the quality model for increasing the literacy level called "From quality to excellence" aims towards the introduction of innovatory service in the field of upbringing and education offering connection with other institutions and possibilities of growth. It is directed towards an educational system which will enable pupils to acquire quality knowledge, develop their various abilities and give them a good foundation for their future life. Our efforts are oriented to people not in the meaning of larger quantity but in the sense of sincere endeavor towards top-level knowledge accessible to anyone.

Individuals will be enabled to prove their knowledge and their moral values in today's European market.

In April 2006 the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport published a public tender for co-financing the educational organization network in the field of ascertaining and developing quality in the years 2006 and 2007 giving Brežice Elementary School an opportunity to co-operate with six other elementary schools (Slovenj Gradec Elementary School 2, Grm Elementary School, Majda Vrhovnik Elementary School, Podzemelj Elementary School, Trbovlje Elementary School and Voličina Elementary School) from various Slovenian districts and other public institutions, firms, publishing houses... The principal idea of the project is to refine and develop all literacy levels in elementary schools – www.simos.si.

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Brežice Elementary school has so far been awarded with many national and municipal acknowledgements. Two of the most prestigious awards in the past were: Žagarjevo priznanje (Ljubljana, 1979) and Oktobrsko priznanje (Brežice, 1981). The pupils have achieved many acknowledgements in the field of sports and other competitions.

On 5 November 2005 the school received one of the highest recognitions so far. The award was given by the Board of Education of Republic of Slovenia for various achievements in the past few years. The school also received an award for the national athletics champion and an award for the most successful school in the field of sports. In the year 2006 Brežice Primary School received two more awards. Our school was announced to be the second tidiest school in the Republic of Slovenia while Brežice Municipality rewarded our school for its project "The literacy development model".

2.1. In which field of work inside the model is our work being carried out?

Book Plus: we attend to mother tongue, cultural and spiritual growth – dancing, art, musical activities; journalistic and literary activities; literacy development: reading in Slovenian and foreign languages (publishing a book written by our pupils called "5 Ms, pupils' portfolios, BIPS – Reading and writing together (a project to encourage all family members' literacy), development of computer, science, music, ethics literacy – "School library on Internet" – www.knjiznica.net; SIMOS – Slovenian Elementary School Internet Network – www.simos.si),

Being and having: we built a classroom in the nature and enabled pupils of all ages to get to know the principles of science using active work methods. (a project called "No tree – no forest!" which includes all pupils, their mentors and other co-workers),

Today is a unique day: we attend to eating healthy food and doing more exercises (5 hours of PE per week in first, second, third and fourth grade, one apple per day...), Healthy School, Apples in School, FIT Slovenia,

I, you, we: long lasting partnerships in Comenius, Unesco, ASPnet , EIP – schools for peace, co-operation with various institutions, associations, schools for pupils with special needs in the local environment, (we co-operate with schools in Brežice Municipality, Ministry of Education and Sport, Faculty of Education in Ljubljana and Koper, (Model 3 and 4), ARS Ramovž, Dobransy Elementary School, Czech Republic and schools from former republic of Yugoslavia...).

Internet Reading Collection: (development of all literacy levels)

3. Conclusion

Self-evaluation enables us to use autonomous approach when evaluating other projects and school work. School's quality does not only show in performing individual tasks, but also when we are confronted with connection and interaction of various tasks to achieve certain goals. It also shows in pupils' and parents' pleasure to be part of Brežice Elementary School. Self-evaluation is used to find out which processes are successful and which are not. Self-evaluation presents a foundation for radical deliberation and new planning. This is our contribution to the program realization which originated under the influence of Lisbon resolutions and European Union directions and is known under the title "Education and Training 2010".

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