SV1 report

The main assumption of the study visit in Wales was an observation of good practices used in local schools, paying attention to similarities and differences to our school and sharing experiences with other delegates. Assessment and feedback are the two areas that are the most interesting for me so that is why I would like to focus on them while visiting Welsh schools. Before coming to Wales I asked myself the following questions and I wanted them to guide me during the visit and focus my attention during observations to certain areas.

1. How are the students assessed?
2. What feedback do they get? What is the form of it?
3. What are the ways of monitoring students’ progress?
4. How do the teachers try to individually approach each student while assessing them?
5. Is the grade an honest information about student’s knowledge?
6. What do the students feel when they are being assessed?

The subject of assessment and feedback is very wide and it is impossible to find answers to all the asked questions and to create a perfect way to assess students during one study visit. However, both visiting our partner schools in Wales and attending workshops at the university gave me the opportunity to look at the subject from   
a different perspective and made me think more about it.

During the study visit three elements attracted my attention the most when it comes to the assessment, feedback and emotions while being assessed. One of the exercises which was presented during workshops at the university was strictly related to the grades and the information that this grade gives the student. The aim of this exercise was to show that there are a lot of methods of assessment and how important are clear and understandable criteria. Without those criteria teachers may assess students differently because they may focus on different aspects of their work. This exercise showed us also how many elements influence the final effect of students’ work and that even a very simple task (like drawing a house in this case) can be done incorrectly because students’ work may be disturbed by external factors (such as misunderstanding the instructions or stress). In this situation a grade do not represent the actual knowledge.

Another element that attracted my attention during workshops at the university was an impact of emotions on students’ work and of course on their grades. The effectiveness of students’ work depends on being in one of the three zones: safety, challenge and panic. The students work best when they are in the challenge zone because on one hand the tasks that they are supposed to do demand from them to put some effort in doing it and on the other hand the tasks do not cause the negative amount of stress which may cause discouragement. The analysis of the scheme showing the three zones makes me as a teacher think about things that I can do and how to create tasks so the students can be in the challenge zone. Another question appears: Does the fact of being assessed put the student in panic zone?

Assessment is a crucial part of teacher’s work. Grades should give information about students’ progress and help the teachers monitor their work. Our School Internal Assessment System introduces six-grade scale. However, do the students understand their grades? Do they get a proper feedback? During my visit in Wales I learnt a very good way of monitoring students’ work. On a board there were shown each student’s present achievements and expectations on their future school performance. Students discussed plans for their future work, elements that they should focus on and ways of achieving even better results during individual meetings with their teacher. Visual form of presenting students’ current achievements and expectations of their performance helps them realize that they can achieve more and that with some effort and teacher’s support they can move up the scale. In my opinion it is a very good way of linking an individual approach to every student and proper feedback.

Observations, discussions with teachers and attending workshops during the study visit in Wales became a starting point for further considerations and exploring the subject of assessment and feedback. To involve as many teachers as possible in those considerations, this subject was discussed during teachers’ meeting in our school. The teachers did the described previously exercise. They also discussed the subject and shared experiences and opinions. The study visit in Wales let me look at the subject of assessment and feedback from a different perspective. It made me think and motivated me to discuss the matter and share experiences with other teachers. The subject is very complicated and it needs time to find the answers to the asked questions. It also means making some changes and looking critically at our own workshop.

Assessment and feedback are still one of my main interests and the experiences that I got during the first study visit motivate me to look deeper and to conduct research in my school in the nearest future. The research should provide answers to the following questions:

1. What information does the grade give to a student?
2. Is the given feedback enough?
3. What is the best way to give students feedback?
4. How to improve my workshop in this area?

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