

**A project for basic and in-service training
for teachers of the lower/upper secondary schools in Zagora**

**Title of the project: Using distance communication & the internet
for in-service training and professional self-development**

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Background

Zagora delegation is a very vast area where schools are scattered in different isolated places. There are 60 lower and upper secondary school teachers in 20 institutions and most of them are newly recruited. All lower secondary school (middle school) teachers are new as English was introduced in this level in the school year 2003-2004. The distance between institutions varies between 20 km and 250 km and I am the only inspector in the area. In-service training is important and necessary for these teachers but it is at the same time a difficult task in my case with few transportation facilities and insufficient budget.

However, there are some positive elements that may help remedy the situation. Most of the concerned schools have at least 5 computers each and the Internet is being introduced at an encouraging rate. Also, because they come from or studied in big cities, most of the concerned teachers have some basic knowledge of ICT (information and communication technology), such as using email, browsing the Internet, using a search engine, word-processing, etc. What they need as far as ICT is concerned is to use those skills in addition to other necessary ICT skills for in-service training and professional self-development purposes.

Given the experience I have gained from the ICT courses I attended and conducted, I think online communication (both synchronous and asynchronous) and the Internet (for information and ELT related documents) will be of great help to overcome the many obstacles that hinder an effective and adequate in-service training.

For these subjective and objective reasons, I had to think of an effective way that may allow me to adequately supervise the teachers in my area and organize sufficient in-service training sessions. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, the choice of this project is based on the following rationale.

Rationale:

- English language teaching is new in the Moroccan lower secondary school, consequently all the teachers are new and have very limited professional experience
- Teachers teach in a lower secondary school after 2 years in university and 1 year in a teacher training center (CPR) which is an insufficient period of time to allow them to master the English language and English language teaching (ELT) methodology
- The Moroccan educational system is undergoing an important period of change (the new educational reform) that makes it full of novelty both in syllabuses, methodology and textbooks
- Most middle school teachers are appointed in rural areas, especially in the area where I work (Zagora delegation), therefore they work with very limited resources
- The area where I work is vast and scattered, i.e. the distance between institutions is a bit large and contact between teachers from different areas is limited
- It's time, money and effort consuming to move long distances just to supervise one teacher or two.

Goals and objectives

- to introduce teachers to some ICT skills that may help them in in-service training and professional self-development
- to overcome the geographical obstacles and conduct as many in-service training sessions as possible
- to expose teachers to a rich English input on the net that will help them develop their English and at the same time learn more about ELT methodology
- to create as many as possible opportunities of communication to tackle local and personalized problems
- to use ICT skills in ELT projects that deal with urgent teachers' needs.

How will the objectives be achieved?

- Face-to-face training sessions with teachers at a first stage to provide them with basic skills
- Gradual use of online communication (email, mailing lists, threaded discussions, etc)
- Web browsing to search for websites related to ELT methodology together with link sharing and holists
- Conducting e-workshops through online environments (for example www.nicenet.org)
- Online assignments through webquests and nicenet assignments
- Getting indulged into ELT projects dealing with teachers' urgent needs.
- Etc.

What are the necessary tools?

- a website will be built and uploaded for the above-stated goals
- a yahoo-group will be created (already done)
- a nicenet class will be set up (already done)
- webquests and hotlists will be created via Filamentality at <http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil> (a hotlist is already created).

What are the materials?

- the available computers in the schools
- paper-based materials that explain the know-how and techniques (such as guides and tutorials)
- off-line materials on CD ROMs and Floppy disks (which have become cheaper than photocopy)
- Cyber-café's where available
- The internet when available or when teachers go back to their cities of origin in holidays.

Conclusion

This is a rough idea about the project that I intend to work on in the near future with teachers in my area. I have already conducted similar activities with the teachers in the upper secondary school and so many of them are now independent and knowledgeable in the use of ICT for professional development. I think that the facilities provided by the Internet and the Ministry of education's project in ICT are encouraging. Teachers are also motivated to learn more and this is a real case of life long learning as I personally experienced it and as teachers are or will be experiencing.