

Report on visit to Miralcamp, Spain

Aims: The sharing of knowledge and experience through observing the Spanish (Catalonian) education system; evaluating our own practices; visiting local libraries; planning activities and forming professional relationships which will develop into lifelong friendships.

During the 17th to the 20th May the 'Art of Reading - Power of Creativity' Comenius Project teams visited Sant Miguel School in Miralcamp, Spain.

We visited Miralcamp to learn about the Spanish education system. When arriving at the school we were greeted by all the children dancing traditional dances in the playground. We then were taken on a tour of the school visiting classrooms, meeting pupils, and were able to see children's work as well as ask questions, compare their building, classroom furniture and layout and admire the numerous displays. The teachers were extremely hospitable and the children were very friendly and eager to practise their English. We were all made to feel very welcome.

The school is a modern building located on one site in the heart of the town. They have a small outside play area and a gym/hall, but they also have use of the local civic centre which is a short walk away from the school for assemblies and formal occasions. The school has an ICT suite, art room, music room and small support rooms. The library is shared by the local community after school hours.

The school offers places from the age of 3, although compulsory education begins at the age of 6. Children continue at primary until the age of 12. A significant majority of the children are from the local town. Classes are typically in single age groups although this year they have a mixed 5/6 class due to insufficient numbers. The average class size was approximately 15. The school day begins at 8.15am and continues through to 12pm for the younger students and 1pm for the older pupils. School restarts at 3pm until 5pm. During this time some students return home while others remain in school. In the summer months all school finishes at 1pm due to the heat.

After the school tour we went to the Civic Centre to watch a fantastic welcoming festival where every class sang songs in both Catalan, Spanish and English. Everyone was extremely impressed by the confidence and ability of the children. We also had an opportunity to share gifts and work created by the children in each country. After this the Comenius partners met the Mayor at the Town Hall and were taken to lunch and for a visit to the Canal Museum and local nature reserve.

On the Wednesday evening Comenius partners, Sant Miguel School teachers and parents came together to share the country presentations looking at "a day in our schools" which was followed by fabulous meal prepared by the school's parents.

On Thursday in Lleida we had the opportunity to visit Seu Vella (an ancient cathedral) together with the Museum of Lleida giving us an insight into the city's past, it was especially interesting to see the diversity of the various cultures. We also had the opportunity to visit the local library and it was particularly interesting to see the various children's areas and find out more about what access children and their parents have to reading materials and how this compared to other countries. Finally there was time to do some shopping, go for an ice-cream and wander.

On Friday we transferred to Barcelona which is approximately 2 hours away. Our day started with a visit to the Gaudi's Sagrada Familia Cathedral. We were all overwhelmed by the beauty, light and design of this building. After lunch some of the Comenius partners chose to tour independently while the rest visited the Gothic Quarter and market with our Spanish hosts. The day was finished off with a traditional meal of Tapas before our final goodbyes were said.

The experience of visiting a school, talking to teachers from other countries, listening to the children and finding out about their culture was informative, enjoyable and will never be forgotten.