EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

COMITE SYNDICAL EUROPEEN DE L'EDUCATION

ETUCE
CSEE

Report of the ETUCE Workshop

"Preventing Early School Leaving through the Use of ICT in Education"

Athens, 20 September 2013

Education International
Internationale de l'Education
Internacional de la Educació
Bildungsinternationale

Lifelong Learning Programme

Egalement disponible en français sous le titre :

« Rapport de l'atelier du CSEE:
« Eviter l'abandon scolaire précoce grâce à l'utilisation des TIC dans l'éducation » – Athènes
20 septembre 2013»

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The workshop on preventing early school leaving through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education was held in Athens on September 20, 2013. Representatives from European teacher unions came together to discuss how ICT can motivate and re-attract individuals at risk of exclusion from formal education. Representatives from the education employers and students' unions also joined the workshop.

Martin Rømer, European Director of **ETUCE,** opened the workshop by giving a warm welcome to all participants. Mr Rømer especially thanked Themistokles Kotsifakis, President of the Greek teacher union of secondary school teachers, OLME, for attending the meeting in times of great pressure inflicted upon the education system in Greece due to austerity measures.

In his words of welcome, the President of the Greek Teacher Union of Secondary School Teachers, OLME, spoke about the difficult economic situation in Greece at present. He said that the austerity measures did not solve the debt problem but their impact on public goods, such as health care and education, rather increases unemployment, especially among young people. While the budget for education was cut by 33 per cent,
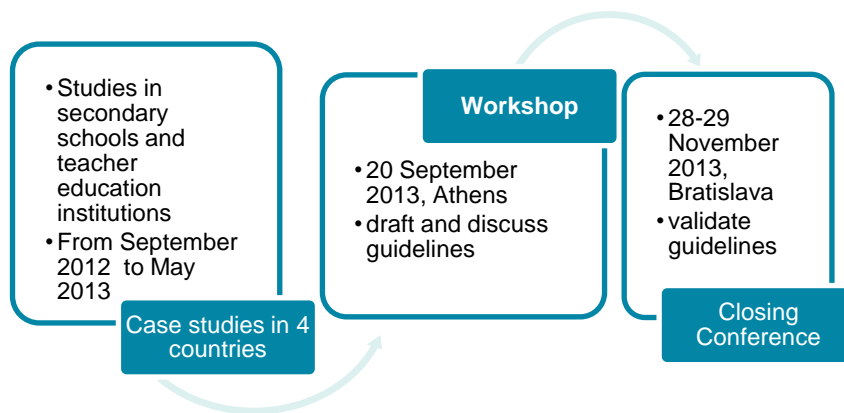

Themistokles Kotsifakis and Martin Rømer

teachers were either dismissed or forced to hand in their leave. In comparison with the situation before the crisis, Greece had dismissed about one third of its teachers. The difficult economic situation together with the pressure put on the education system will most likely lead to more students dropping out of school.

With regard to ICT, the impact of the economic crisis is also visible. As the state reduces the budget on ICT in education, schools lose part of their ICT equipment because devices cannot be renewed. When teachers and families have to pay for computers, printers, internet access, and other equipment for themselves, students from poorer families are at risk of being left behind. Mr Kotsifakis stressed in his final remarks that it is important that the unity of employees addresses this problem together. He thanked the ETUCE member organisations for their support and solidarity.

2. Project description

In the opening speech, Mr Rømer pointed out that Europe currently faces both a high number of school drop-outs as well as a shortage in ICT skills among professionals. Mr Rømer explained that the on-going ETUCE project, of which the workshop forms part, combines these two issues as it examines how the use of ICT in education can help to motivate potential dropouts back to school. Further, specific skills that teachers need to include ICT in education shall be determined. Finally, concrete, practical guidelines on the successful use of ICT to prevent Early School Leaving shall be developed. The guidelines shall be validated in a final conference in November 2013 and will be sent to the ETUCE Committee for approval.

- Studies in secondary schools and teacher education institutions
- From September 2012 to May 2013

Case studies in 4 countries

Workshop
- 20 September 2013, Athens
- draft and discuss guidelines

- 28-29 November 2013, Bratislava
- validate guidelines

Closing Conference

For this reason, four case studies in schools and teacher education institutions in Denmark, The Netherlands, Portugal and Azerbaijan were conducted, examining good practices on the pedagogic use of ICT for the prevention of early school leaving.

The project's advisory group, together with experts on Early School Leaving and on the Use of ICT in Education, interviewed teachers, educational staff, students and representatives from national education institutions to determine best practices on how to prevent early school leaving.

The Advisory Group: Hans Laugesen, GL (Project coordinator); Bert Imminga, Aob; Ivan Šóš, OZPŠaV; Eleni Zografaki, OLME; Maria Arminda Bragança, FNE; George Koursakov, ESEUR; Nigar Mustafazade, AITUCEW

3. Results from the Project Case Studies

Mr Guntars Catlaks, expert on early school leaving, pointed out that in all case studies, the advisory group observed dedication and commitment to use ICT in education.


Guntars Catlaks

All of the interviewees found ICT to be a powerful tool in the classroom. Generally, teaching staff did not speak of potential dangers of ICT to the teaching profession, but seemed rather enthusiastic about the new technologies. For example, the teachers at the Hondsrug School (The Netherlands) did not feel that it was a burden to keep up communication with their students throughout the weekend, although this might become problematic for collective bargaining on working conditions if it was the standard.

Although teachers were experimenting with ICT quite enthusiastically, the case studies also showed that the knowledge on the pedagogic use of ICT was still rather limited. Similarly, policy makers seem to be in an experimental stage concerning national or government led 'initiatives'. While teachers seemed aware of the use of ICT to present teaching materials in a better way, the potential of ICT for interactive use and its social benefits were generally not mentioned. Restrictions on the use of ICT might be caused by teachers' ICT skills as well as by standardized testing systems and curricula.

Looking at the differences between teachers and schools in the case studies, it came out clear that the issue of ESL is perceived quite differently. In some cases, the interviewees were very much concerned with ESL as a serious issue, in other cases ESL was not regarded a big problem.

Mr Roy Leitch, **expert on the pedagogic use of ICT**, presented the interviews' summative aspects and the relations between the causes of ESL, possible impacts and potential solutions. These relations should be used as the basis for the policy recommendations and are explained in detail in the research report.

Mr Leitch explained that in order to understand ESL it is important to remember that people have different ways of learning. For example, some students find it very hard to sit in a classroom with a teacher all day. As an early detection procedure, SMS can be used to communicate with teachers, students and parents in order to increase students' attendance.
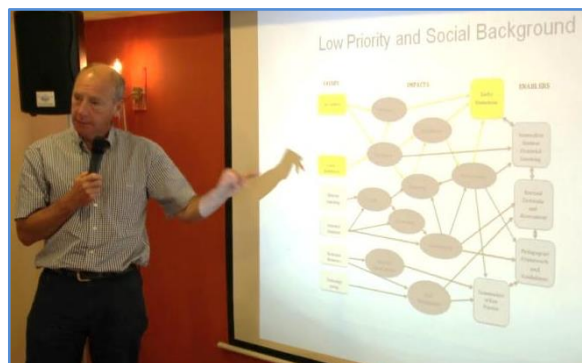
Roy Leitch

Moreover, curricula very often do not reflect school experience as they are designed by experts in academia. In the case study, for example, students in Portugal stated that they did not see themselves and their lives reflected in the curriculum. The gap that opens up between students' school experience and their lives outside school may be bridged by the

use of ICT. Still, the accumulative way of gaining knowledge in the classroom is often inconsistent with the opportunistic access to knowledge on the internet. Therefore, interactive student centered learning may bridge the gap between students' experiences inside and outside school.

Mr Leitch pointed towards the need to find a common approach to teaching the national curricula and promoting a way of changing towards a better vision of education. It would make sense to set up a common terminology and establish a European best practice framework so a community of best practice could develop.

4. Address by the Associate Project Partners

Bianka Stege, General Secretary of the **European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE)**, welcomed all the participants to the workshop and pointed out some of the benefits of the use of ICT in education. While ICT and the use of multi-media can help people with special needs, it can neither replace teachers, nor the curriculum. Rather, it should be used as a complement within a study programme. Mrs Stege briefly commented on some of the issues connected to early school leaving. She stressed that dropping out of school is not a mere matter of academic failure but the result of social disengagement. Because most causes of early school leaving are based on social problems, ESL needs to be tackled in co-ordinated social programmes.

Bianka Stege and Martin Rømer

Nora Kleibel

Nora Kleibel from the **Organising Bureau of European Students' Unions (OBESSU)** observed in her welcome speech that students drop out of school because of lacking support. As education frameworks do not always fulfil their task of providing a learning environment that fosters students' individual development, a paradigm shift is needed. Students should feel that they are valued as individuals at school.

5. Speeches

a.   Early School Leaving – A Challenge for Quality Education

The first presentation was given by **Maria Nikolakaki** from the **University of Peloponnese**, Greece, in co-operation with **Pavlos Charamis**, **Centre for Educational Research and Documentation of OLME**. Mrs Nikolakaki pointed out that Education is both a fundamental human right as well as a means to prepare future citizens. Early school leaving has severe consequences for both the individual and the society. She reminded the participants not to forget that this in the discussion on early school leaving because students who leave school are not free in their decision to do so. Early school leaving is rather connected to the unequal distribution of wealth in society. The significance of education should be to foster the individual, to give room for the innate tendencies of children, and to allow for human growth.

Pavlos Charamis and Maria Nikolakaki

Mrs Nikolakaki continued her analysis stating that at present, however, education institutions have become market-driven institutions forced to follow the laws of the market. Schools' budgets depend on the strength of the market and the socio-economic background of students decides about their success. In the current economic crisis, working hours for teachers have increased, teachers' salaries and schools' budgets are cut, and schools are closed or being merged.

On the issue of early school leaving, this means that more students will leave school in order to take on a job. Although there have not been official statistics on early school leaving in Greece for many years, it is very likely that the figure of 13 per cent of early school leavers in 2007 will have increased during the last years. There is the risk that completing compulsory education becomes unattractive when it is working experiences that primarily qualify for future jobs. If early school leaving is to be reduced, then schools need to be funded adequately. Furthermore, more people need to have access to quality education, so pupils from families with lower incomes can attend and stay in school. In Greece, there is also the problem that schools are far away from housing areas and insufficiently connected to public transport. When families cannot provide for transportation themselves, students are at risk of leaving school early. When dealing with these challenges, it is important to remember that technology is a means and not a solution.

## b. Using ICT Pedagogically for the Prevention of ESL

Gráinne Conole from the **Institute of Learning Innovation at the University of Leicester**, UK, spoke on the pedagogic use of ICT in education to prevent early school leaving. She also provided the participants with an overview of the current developments in the field of e-learning and the use of technologies in education.

Gráinne Conole

Mrs Conole argued that e-learning has many advantages such as that it supports interaction, communication and collaboration between learners and helps them to develop digital literacy skills. Further, e-learning promotes different pedagogical approaches that may foster students' creativity and motivation. As e-learning connects students beyond the formal course it can help to prevent early school dropouts. Considering that nowadays people tend to change careers more often, and also taking into account that technologies increasingly vital aspect of society, e-learning can prepare students for life in general, and for the future in particular. Many existing objects and devices have been replaced by new technology and social media. The new technologies have in common that they are open, participatory, dynamic, and fit for networks. Mrs Conole observed that all the devices are part of a complex ecosystem and are used by different users in different ways.

Current trends in technology, which innovative pedagogy tries to take up, are Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), badges to accredit learning, learning analytics, seamless learning, crowd learning, digital scholarship, geo-learning, and learning from gaming. Regarding the present use of ICT in education, Mrs Conole pointed out that technologies are not explored to their full potential at present. In schools, technologies are used to 95 per cent only for uploading content. In order to make use of the full potential of technologies, the Institute of Learning Innovation defined seven steps that should be included in any design of technology-based education courses:
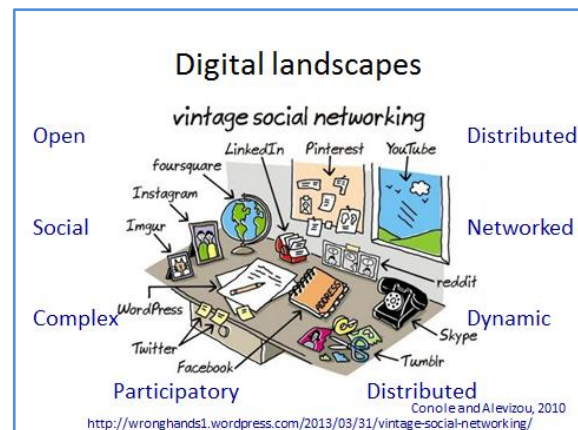
1. **consolidate**: put the completed design into practice, evaluate it and refine it
2. **conceptualise**: for whom do you want to design which course and why
3. **capture**: find and create interactive materials
4. **communicate**: design activities that foster communication
5. **collaborate**: design activities that foster collaboration
6. **consider**: design activities that foster reflection
7. **combine** the learning activities into a comprehensive course overview (activity profiles, storyboard, learning pathway)

Tackling ESL with support of technology
• Advice on effective study skills
• Listening to students' concerns
• Creating a virtual community of peers
• Providing rich multimedia resources
• Offering ideas on post-school opportunities

With regard to preventing ESL, Mrs Conole listed several functions technologies could fulfil. Generally, technologies can assist by providing virtual support on overcoming learning obstacles and by creating networks. Certainly, technology can also be used as a means to monitor students' progress, but these tools may have a more promising effect if they are given to students so these learn to plan and overview learning activities themselves. Concluding, Mrs Conole stressed the need to harness new media and adopt open practices because the nature of learning, teaching and research, and also teachers' roles are changing. Certainly, practical questions need to be overcome, so that traditional schools can develop.

6. Results of the Workshop

The participants noticed that not all the issue connected to Early School Leaving can be solved through the use of ICT. For example, it is uncertain how ICT can help dealing with students' social problems and needs. While technology in itself may not be the solution, **intervention programmes should be adapted to the needs of students**. The best practices are those, which can be adapted to each student's individual situation.

Individualised teaching approaches which pay respect to students' particular situation are very helpful for students at risk of dropping out of school. However, they are difficult to implement if the size of the group is too big. Technology may help to overcome this challenge; however, teacher unions should **demand better technical infrastructures in schools and educational institutions**. In this respect, it is also important to further improve the social dialogue.

Software which is specifically adapted to the needs and interests of students may help to bridge the gap between students' experiences in school and their lives outside school. Certainly, good **educational software should fit to the specific situation of the learner**. For example, adults who dropped out of school at an early age and did not continue formal education since then may have special aims and needs.

Looking at educational software more generally, **teacher trade unions should take a stronger role in identifying, creating, shaping, and controlling software to be used in educational institutions**. While teacher unions cannot expect to control the new

technologies, they should take a role in influencing the material that is produced for educational purposes.

In order to prevent ESL, teacher unions could suggest changes for the curriculum and **promote student centred education**. Each country in Europe should consider how it can adapt the curriculum and meet the requirements for training on ICT to prevent ESL. The focus should be on co-operative action, not on common EU-wide assessment. There is a gap as in some countries the use of ICT in the classroom is expected, but it is not included in the curriculum.

E-learning may help students to catch up if they have not been at school for some time. Information on class contents and homework can be put on-line, so students have it at their disposal easily. Teachers could be encouraged to ask their students which technology they use already, so they could build on this knowledge in their lessons.

The enforcement of ICT in education should not create a gap between those who are very skilled in the use of ICT and those who have little experience in this field so far. As professionals, teachers should demand better study facilities and sources for professional development. All working groups stressed that efforts should be made to **improve teachers' training in ICT and on the issue of ESL** on all levels. This will help to overcome the challenges and adds value to teachers' training.

With regard to teachers' training on the use of ICT for pedagogical purposes, training measures should not be an obligation, but should rather be an attractive way for teachers to develop in their profession. Teachers should be given room to try out different ways of teaching.

With regard to ESL, training in handling these situations is needed. As there are different reasons for drop out, teachers need to know when to deal with a situation on their own and when and how to include others in order to prevent early school leaving. Therefore, the prevention of early school leaving should be included in the programme of teacher training intuitions.

In order to **develop the pedagogical use of ICT in classrooms**, teacher unions could intervene on all three levels: school level, national level, and European level. In schools and educational institutions, the benefits of using ICT should be shown so as to provide proof of the advantages connected to the use of ICT. Pedagogical arguments should be formulated in order to convince other schools, teaching staff, as well as national and regional authorities to initiate changes. As collaboration on the issue of using ICT to prevent ESL is needed, schools could, in addition to establishing a school action plan for the use of ICT to

differentiate and motivate the students, stimulate a process in which teacher unions, schools, the employers as well as regional and national authorities work together.

On national level, teacher unions could stimulate the use of ICT in the classroom by creating platforms for peer learning on the use of ICT in the classroom. This is to say they could prepare ICT lessons to disseminate amongst their teaching staff and create platforms for sharing material and knowledge.

Further, the workshop showed that **collaboration between the stakeholders in education** on the topic is important as inspirations from others can be very helpful to find new ways to use ICT in education. Teacher unions need to continue spreading and supporting the good work that has been done so far.

On European level, teacher unions should demand bigger investments in teachers' initial and continuous professional training and in the infrastructure of educational institutions. All stakeholders should be stimulated to work together on the use of technology in reducing ESL, and policies on national and international level should be developed. Policies should pay respect to the fact that the state of early school leaving and its connected issues differs greatly between countries.

Teacher unions could explain the relationship between education, early school leaving, the labour market, and the economy to other stakeholders in education. Moreover, they could encourage research on using technology in education.

7. Agenda

20 September 2013, Athens

09:00 – 09:30   *Registration*

09:30 – 10:00   **Opening**
                       By Martin Rømer, European Director, ETUCE

                       Words of welcome
                       By Themis Kotsifakis, President, OLME

                       Short address by the Associate project partners
                       Bianka Stege, General Secretary, EFEE

                       Nora Kleibel, Board member, OBESSU

10:00 – 10:40   **Early school leaving – a challenge for quality education**

                       By Maria Nikolakaki, University of Peloponnese, in co-operation with Pavlos Charamis, Centre for Educational Research and Documentation of OLME, Greece

10:40 – 11:20   **Using ICT pedagogically for the prevention of early school leaving**
                       By Prof. Gráinne Conole, Institute of Learning Innovation, University of Leicester, UK

11:20 – 11:40   *Coffee break*

11:40 – 12:30   **Presentation of the project results from the four case studies**
                       By Guntars Catlaks (EI) and Roy Leitch, UK (project experts)

12:30 – 14:00   *Lunch*

14:00 –15:30   **Working group session on teacher union strategies to prevent early school leaving through the use of ICT in education** *(including coffee break)*

15:30 – 15:50   **Reports from the working groups**

15:50 – 16:50   **Plenary discussion**

16:50 – 17:00   **Summary**
                       By Hans Laugesen (Project co-ordinator)

17:00   **Close**
                       By Martin Rømer, European Director, ETUCE

8. Abbreviations

EI   Education International

ESL   Early School Leaving

ETUCE   European Trade Union Committee for Education

ICT   Information and Communication Technology

MOOCs   Massive Open Online Courses

EFEE   European Federation of Education Employers

OBESSU   Organising Bureau of European Students' Unions

9. Associated Partners

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