

STRATEGIES TO OPTIMIZE THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS: TACKLING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING AND BULLYING

STRATEGII DE OPTIMIZARE A PROCESULUI INSTRUCTIV-EDUCATIV: LUPTA ÎMPOTRIVA ABSENTEISMULUI ȘI A VIOLENȚEI ȘCOLARE

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Abstract. *A common challenge for the European school systems is the prevention of early school leaving and prevention of the bullying phenomenon. Many surveys carried out at European level highlight how the phenomenon of bullying and early school leaving is involving an increasing number of pupils. This situation describes a scenario where two fundamental rights of pupils are menaced: educational rights and personal security rights. Two European projects: Stay @ School and I am not scared have set out to find solutions to these stringent problems.*

Key words: *educational system, strategies, early school leaving, bullying*

Rezumat. *O provocare comună pentru sistemele de învățământ europene este prevenirea părăsirii timpurii a școlii și prevenirea fenomenului de violență școlară. Cercetarea desfășurată la nivel european scot în evidență faptul că fenomenul de părăsire timpurie a școlii și fenomenul violenței școlare implică un număr tot mai mare de elevi. Această situație descrie un scenariu în care două drepturi fundamentale ale copiilor sunt încălcate: dreptul la educație și dreptul la securitate personală. Două proiecte europene: Stay @ School și I am not scared și-au propus găsirea de soluții pentru aceste probleme stringente.*

Cuvinte cheie: *sistem educațional, strategii, abandon școlar, violență școlară*

As the early school leaving and the bullying phenomenon are ones of the main challenges that all European educational systems have to deal with, the “Stay@school” (<http://projects.pixel-online.org/stayatschool/info/>) and “I am not scared” (<http://iamnotscared.pixel-online.org/>) projects intends to identify the best European strategies to prevent and combat the school leaving and bullying phenomenon and involve secondary school and vocational education teachers, directors, pupils, parents and key policy makers in the field of education in a common reflection based on a bottom-up approach for a transnational sharing of the dynamics that can cause the emerging and consolidating of these two

worrying phenomenon's and of the most effective strategies and behaviour to tackle it available at European level.

The School Inclusion N° 134309-LLP-1-2007-1-IT-Comenius -CMP, financed in the framework of the Life Long Programme, Comenius subprogramme has given evidence to the fact that teachers are suffering from a lack of skills and competences, and consequently of motivation in understanding and dealing with pupils at risk of school abandoning. Teachers often are not able to identify with the necessary anticipation the manifesting of the risk factors leading drop out and to the necessary initiatives to give effective answers.

The Stay@School project objectives are to provide an effective answer to the needs of the teachers outlined above, intends to transfer the successful experience of the School Inclusion project, evaluated positively both by the European Commission and by the external evaluator: "the main contents of the teachers' training programme provides the necessary skills and tools to fight students' drop out and prevent early school leaving".

The project aims to improve the portal developed during the School Inclusion project in order to transfer its contents on a Geographical basis, focusing on the involvement of teachers from different countries that the ones that were involved in the previous project and as far as Italy is concerned, spreading the use of the School Inclusion Portal in different regions.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The project intends to transfer the main products of the School Inclusion project:

- The online training course aimed at preparing teachers to identify students at risk of early dropout and provide them with skills to prevent the problem.
- The database of 240 reviews of the most important European publications on the topic of scholastic drop out.
- The collection of 25 Case Studies of students who have dropped out of school and direct experiences of 52 teachers who have been successful in preventing the problem of dropping out of school.

For the following subjects:

- 80 new teachers in higher education, technical institutes and Italian vocational institutes in 3 different regions: Tuscany (with other schools not already involved in the School Inclusion Projects) Veneto and Lazio.
- 60 new teachers in high schools, technical institutes and vocational institutes from 3 different European countries: Romania, Spain, and Belgium.

Through the following activities:

- Translation Portal in Italian
- Translation of the training course in 3 new languages: Romanian, French, and Spanish.
- The organization's use of the course in a "Blended Learning" mode, supported by the organization of virtual conferences during which teachers can share their experiences and opinions.
- The integration of the publication database with new reviews

- The integration of the collection of experiences of teachers with new contributions both to describe new cases and to discuss the existing ones (cooperative learning).

- The creation of a collection of 35 reviews of training events for teachers on the issue of dropping out of school. Each event will be described in its main functions in order to highlight the strengths and elements useful to a potential transfer.

- The involvement of teachers in the production of educational and informational materials aimed at teachers and students on the theme of prevention and fight against school drop-out, as the practical application of “learning by doing” is learned during the course.

The Training Package consists of:

1. Five [on-line course modules](#) focusing firstly on how to identify students at risk and then on strategies which can be used to address the problem: communication techniques, teaching methodologies promoting an active participation, evaluation of educational processes and finally on external resources and support for teachers and students.

2. [Teachers Forum](#) to comment and receive further information on each of the modules. Teachers are invited to use the Forum to interact with each other and to contact the authors of the course. On the Forum, the authors of each of the course modules answer questions and provide clarification or further information about the contents of the module they have developed.

3. [Reports](#) on the current educational systems, current ‘drop out’ situations and the current ‘drop out’ national trends, in five European countries, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and the United Kingdom. Each report identifies the recognised causes, current preventative strategies in operation or planned, and best practices identified, in respect of early school leaving issues.

4. [Reviews of Publications](#) a database of relevant material available in 4 different European countries on the topic of early school leaving. The reviews of books, studies, educational papers, statistics, official documents, web sites etc., were produced by the partners and experts involved in the School Inclusion project.

5. Presentation of [Case Studies](#) focusing on real life examples of young students who dropped out of school before completing their compulsory education. Each example is presented with an introductory description followed by an analysis of the causes that led to early school leaving by the student, the strategy adopted to deal the problem and the successful solution (if any) identified.

6. [Interviews](#) were undertaken, in five different European countries, with politicians in charge of educational policies, school directors, teachers, students and parents on the subject of early school leaving.

7. Description of [Experiences](#) of teachers in dealing with the problem of early school leaving. This interactive space provides teachers with the opportunity to share experiences and learn from the approaches and techniques used by other teachers facing the same problem of students at risk of dropping out.

The teachers training course is organized in 5 modules:

Module 1: [Identification of Students at Risk](#) Author: Wilsthorpe Business & Enterprise College (England)

Module 2: [Communication](#) Author: Zepf (Germany)

Module 3: [Teaching methods](#) Author: C.I.P.A.T. (Italy)

Module 4: [Educational Evaluation and early school leaving prevention](#) Author: ASPETE (Greece)

Module 5: [External support and cooperation](#) Author: Mayo Education Centre (Ireland)

The first module [Identification of students at risk](#) aims to help teachers and other educational professionals to identify young people at risk of dropping out of education. The module is based on a small number of case study interviews with young people, parents, teachers, Head teachers, Public Officers and has been produced after extensive research undertaken in the production of the National Report in the project partner' countries. For the purpose of this module the identification factors to look for which can lead to school 'drop outs' or early course leavers, have been divided into four chapters, educational, personal, family and community.

The second module [Communication](#) provides practical proposals on how to facilitate communication with difficult students. This module identifies the best ways to prevent communication difficulties which may lead to a student dropping out from school. The module also offers suggestions on how to deal with students who are at risk of school dropping out, and suggestions on how to react to the first signs of absenteeism. Finally the module offers practical ideas on how to prepare and carry out an effective conversation with young people and their parents as well as on the actions to be taken after this conversation has taken place.

The third module [Teaching Methods](#) focuses on effective teaching strategies that foster the active involvement of all students in productive educational pathways. The strategies proposed include active teaching and learning, cooperative learning, peer education and the effective application of creativity to education.

The fourth module [Educational Evaluation and early school leaving prevention](#) focuses on Evaluation which is a dynamic feature of any educational process. In the case of the early school leaving prevention, evaluation is strongly related to the pupils' needs assessment before their engagement in a learning activity in order to identify in time their learning difficulties. Teachers need to be acquainted with the modern meaning of evaluation, evaluation types and forms, evaluation models, techniques and tools in order to become able to use them effectively in their school classes to achieve, among other educational objectives, the prevention of early school leaving.

The fifth module [External support and cooperation](#) examines external resources and supports for teachers and students to help them in the prevention of early school leaving. The module includes an introduction to authentic scenarios for reflection, an exploration of a variety of teacher responses to students in danger of leaving school early, an exploration of the level of risk of particular students, a description of the range of support available to help with the problem and the examination of the different types of support available for students with varying needs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Expected results of the Stay@School project (co-funded by the European Commission under the Life Long Learning Programme, Leonardo Da Vinci Subprogramme – Multilateral Project Transfer of Innovation, 2011-1-IT1-LEO05-01961):

- Reducing the number of school dropouts and student who skip school.
- Teachers will learn to use efficient communication strategies (they will be more assertive, empathetic and they will be better at expressing their emotions)
- Teacher will incorporate the approach and solving methods of dealing with interpersonal conflicts; they will demonstrate conflict negotiation abilities,

compromise in solving conflicts and they will transfer these newly learned skills to their students and the parents

- Teacher will be able to point out their abilities, as well as flaws, they will have a realistic image, correct by comparison to those around them.
- Teachers will train their students 'defense abilities, so that they will be able to defend their rights in the family, school and community.
- Teachers will practice the assertive and empathetic skill of interaction with those around them ;
- Teacher will be able to build a set of polite behavior rules to be respected in school and outside of the school environment;
- Teachers will be convinced that it is mandatory to respect school rules and legislation in general;
- Teacher will use the conflict rejection skills they have learn, they will demonstrate an empathetic and assertive behavior and they will pass this on to the students and parents.

As it was mentioned in the first part of the article the Stay@School project is closely related with another project I am not scared which intends to identify the best strategies to prevent and combat the bullying phenomenon and provide Secondary school and Vocational Education teachers, Directors Pupils, Parents and key policy makers in the field of education with a better understanding of the dynamics that can lead to the emerging and consolidating of the bullying phenomenon.

Expected results of the I am not scared project (co-funded by the European Commission under the Life Long Learning Programme, KA1 Policy Cooperation and Innovation Studies and comparative research, 511645-LLP-1-2010-1-IT-KA1-KA1SCR):

- Review of publications addressing the bullying phenomenon available in the 8 countries involved (IT, BE, BG, LT, GR, RO, ES and UK)
- Review of initiatives addressing the theme of Bullying phenomenon prevention
- Case studies aiming at analysing bullying episodes from all the possible points of view of the different actors (students, teachers, schools' directors, parents of the students, and key policy makers)
- Participation of the teachers involved (those objects of the case studies) in a peer to peer based knowledge sharing experience, with which they will comment the case studies of the other countries
- National Reports presenting the results of the activities described above and defining each country state of art and of a Transnational Report presenting in a comparative logic, similarities and main differences

- Development of a European strategy to be implemented in order to combat the bullying phenomenon based on the best practices in the field emerging in the different countries.

CONCLUSIONS

The projects contributes to the success and effectiveness of lifelong learning policies as it tackles the school leaving and bullying phenomenon that highly affects the rights of pupils to receive education. Being a victim of bullyism can be a cause of school abandoning, can lead to social exclusion and passivity of individuals. The projects provides a solution to tackle this by the development of a high quality strategy to be used by all actors of the school systems to better understand and tackle these situations and remove those related obstacles that threaten students' chances to be active and wary citizens.

REFERENCES

1. <http://iamnotscared.pixel-online.org>
2. <http://projects.pixel-online.org/stayatschool/info/>