Module 5 "External support and cooperation"

Meeting held on March 25 2013 at 15:00 CET

The video of the meeting is available on this Internet address:
(http://flashmeeting.e2bn.net/fm/242c05-15832)

Participants

Partners

Federico Fragasso (Pixel), Christine Cloes (Inforef), Enric Ortega (Florida), Paola Bertini (Datini), Andreea Cleminte (EuroEd), Mauro Di Grazia (CIPAT), Lucia Nicolai (CIPAT), Camilla Tamiozzo (USR Veneto)

Teachers

Martine Prignon (Inforef), Julien Keutgen (Inforef), Elena Fecioru (Inforef), Antonella Panziera (IPSIA "C. Scarpa"), Santa Lucia Andolina (IPSIA "C. Scarpa"), Daniela Perotto (IPSIA "C. Scarpa"), Lorenzo Gallina (IPSIA "C. Scarpa"), Mirko Pizzolato (Il Sestante Coop. Sociale), Matteo Vecchiatto Montorio (IPSIA "A. Scotton"), Chiara De Manzano (IIS "L. Luzzatti"), Sara Nalli (IIS "E. De Amicis"), Luigi Veronese (IIS "E. De Amicis"), Fabio Mosco (IIS "E. De Amicis"), Catia Ziggiotto (IIS "E. De Amicis"), Davide Penello (IIS "E. Usuelli Ruzza"), Tiziana Ferlicca (IIS "E. Usuelli Ruzza"), Enrica Lazzaretto (IIS "E. Usuelli Ruzza"), Elza Gheorghiu (Vasile Alecsandri High School)

Minutes

Welcome of Participants and Introduction of the Meeting Agenda

Camilla Tamiozzo from USR Veneto, as moderator of this meeting, welcomes the participants and introduces the teacher in charge of coordinating the virtual meeting on Module 5 "External support and cooperation". The teacher, Ms. Daniela Perotto, will be supported by the representative of the social cooperative "Il Sestante" which usually cooperates with the vocational school "C. Scarpa" in preventing the early school leaving.

Daniela Perotto (USRV) starts the virtual meeting and gives the floor to Inforef representatives in order to present the results of the Belgian workshop.

Teachers' opinions

Belgian teachers (Inforef)

Elena Fecioru (Inforef) summarises the general remarks on Module 5 provided by the Belgian working group. Teachers have appreciated Module 5 because it offers tools that can be used by teaching teams working to prevent the early school leaving. Presenting concrete situations, making awareness, debating and searching for possible solutions are main topics.

The procedure proposed in the external support and cooperation flow chart is interesting. It points out the various actors and interactions to be developed. The module have met working group participants' expectations. However, teachers have not very well understood the Chapter 3 on the risk flag system. This section seems to us less developed if compared with further information given from our Italian partners.

After this introduction Elena Fecioru (Inforef) focuses on the tools available:

Videos

1. The participants have pointed out the consultation process leading to the creation of the videos. They believe it is an interesting idea to allow teachers and students working together to make the videos

2. The selected topics are relevant. The factors described are well-known in our schools. However, they are not typical of the whole problem. We believe that the authors of the module might have also dealt with the following situations: addictions, long-lasting illness, learning difficulties due to lack of prerequisites, learning troubles, lack of differentiated supervision, inadequate course of study, disruptive behaviour in class, financial problems to purchase school material, temporary or definitive expulsion, pupil who works, bad company/delinquency, lack of prospects/bad self-esteem, etc.

3. It is not always easy to understand the issue addressed without the help of the written description. For instance, in the video on "text bullying", bullying does not seem to be attested in our opinion. Only one text is sent while bullying is determined over time and is repeated. Moreover, the "facial expression of frustration", as it is mentioned in the description, cannot really be made out. We think this video would be more evocative for pupils if it were completed.

4. The video on "family factors" is not, in our opinion, very evocative for pupils. Bereavement is evoked in a flash at the end of the video. This choice does not seem judicious to us. For instance, a child who has to take care of his little brother because his parents work would have concerned more pupils …

External Support and Coordination Flow Chart

1. The working group confirms that internal and external interaction of all the actors is the most effective tool against early school leaving. Incidentally, Inforef presented in the "I am not scared" project as well as in "Stay@School" many examples of successful cooperation.

   In Belgium, this cooperation is called "maillage social" ("social networking")!

   However, the participants point out that this cooperation must be first carried out internally, although not cut off from the outside. In Belgium, schools are invited to set up "cellules de veille" ("vigilant units") with the support of school mediation services.

2. The flow chart does not answer to some crucial questions raised in daily practice:

- How to call up, at the right time, the right actors? One flow chart per situation would almost be needed!
- How to use this tool with pupils who do not want to go to school? Educators cannot always meet families. Some schools do not allow it.
- The local network works for underage students. But what can be done when those students are 18?

To conclude: the videos and the coordination flow chart are two interesting tools.

Session of questions and feedback from the partners

Daniela Perotto (USRV) thanks the Belgium team and asks about the existence of any external agencies or groups of people working with them.

Julien Keutgen (Inforef) answers that in Belgium there are many agencies cooperating with schools and Inforef. For example, mediation services that try to mediate between the school and the students; a mediator usually intervenes in order to talk with the student and find a solution; welfare centres to support the students; other services aimed at supporting students who have dropped out of school in order to re-integrate them; finally services to protect children's rights.

Taking into account the information given, Daniela Perotto (USRV) (Inforef) asks if this cooperation system and all the services that collaborate with the school are helpful and if there is a sort of evaluation mechanism that verifies the level of usefulness and possible benefits.

Julien Keutgen (Inforef) answers that some of the services are subject to evaluation every year. In general the system works but services might more interact, communicate and cooperate.

Daniela Perotto (USRV) as moderator thanks the Belgian team and gives the floor to the Romanian representative.

Teachers' opinions

Romanian teachers (EuroED)

Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) summarises the results of the workshop organised with teacher.

This chapter explores further school leaving phenomenon by examining its causes and the support that teachers and students may get. The content of the module is supported by 4 videos which present different case studies. The participants appreciated them as excellent opportunities for reflection and offering good examples which can be applied in practice. They especially discussed the third and the fourth videos whose cases are closer to our situation. The third movie highlights the role that the family has in school leaving. Everybody agreed that the family not only contributes the most to students' interest in and attitude towards school but it also provide them with the necessary financial support. The educational background of the families is the basis of the children's development. This is particularly valid for rural areas where family bonds are very strong. In the fourth video "Exclusion and Inclusion" the role of the family is replaced by the classmates who include or exclude another pupil according to unwritten criteria. It seems that students need to belong to and be accepted by their family, their peers and the community where they live. They need encouragement, support and recognition from these three social spheres in order to develop and find their way in life. Good

communication between these spheres leads to a harmonious confident personality. All teachers agreed that communication also means listening to those involved and not jumping to conclusions. The teachers concluded that "no man is an island" and whenever we identify a student at risk we should take all factors into account and look for reasons behind each problem. We should always allow everybody time and be patient until we find the right solution.

The participants came up with examples of students at risk from their own experience as teachers: a boy from the countryside with a negative attitude towards school, a student having a hard time at school after a long stay in another country or a student who was too dependent on his family. The participants gave their own solutions to these cases and outlined the teacher's role in preventing early school leaving. The teacher has to notice and analyze any changes in students' attitude and behaviour, find their causes and talk about them with the student, family and often with the school counsellor. Any small negative change spotted in time can help reduce the student's risk of leaving school. Teacher's support and encouragement is essential because he is in the position to signal the problem and connect all factors which can solve it.

The participants appreciated the course very much because early school leaving is a very serious issue which marks an individual all his life. By doing this online course the teachers accessed very interesting hands-on materials which are and will be useful for them and their students.

Session of questions and feedback from the partners

Paola Bertini (Datini) highlights that the Romanian teachers have really appreciated the materials on Module 5, in particular the videos as the Italian teachers (Datini group) did. Indeed they were very interested in the practical approach. Paola Bertini (Datini) reminds that the Romanian teachers have especially focused on some videos (third and fourth) that are probably closer to the situation of their country.

After this brief comment Paola Bertini (Datini) asks about the different roles that families, peers and community can play in preventing early school leaving and in particular how families can be encouraged and helped in taking more care for children's school attendance and performance.

Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) answers that families play an important role in supporting the child. If they have the right attitude towards education and recognise its essential role in children's life, no problems will arise. Good communication and best practices at school can help the student and his/her family. Also talking and communicating with children is very important. Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) also points out that education is still fundamental in Romania.

Paola Bertini (Datini) adds that the Romanian group has underlined the important role of the teacher and his/her constant observation and analysis in supporting the student. In this manner the teacher can discover situations at risk. Taking into account this essential role, Paola Bertini (Datini) wants to know how teachers can perform their role in high schools where classes can have a large number of students like in Italy (up to 30 students in the classroom) and how it is the situation in Romania.

Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) specifies that in Romania classes can have from 20 to 32 students. Teachers observe the students very well and if they notice a change, they communicate with the family in order to try to understand what hides behind. In some schools there are computer systems to send messages to families. It is very demanding and teachers make many efforts but this is the best way to act.

Teachers' opinions

Italian teachers (CIPAT)

Daniela Perotto (USRV) thanks the Romanian representative and informs that it is CIPAT turn.

Lucia Nicolai (CIPAT) presents the results of the training on Module 5.

Teachers who have taken part to the different forums, have expressed deep appreciation in discussing about the themes suggested in the modules regarding the fight to early school leaving.

What has emerged from the discussion about their experiences is the difficulty in handling each real situation. The major problems they have highlighted have been:

- Communication with families: parents rarely are helpful or disposed to meet teachers

- Organizing operative and incisive recovery lessons on the basis of cooperative learning in overcrowded classes and often with no other help. A psychologist could be very helpful, as well as that of all the other teachers of the class. Team-work is not so easy to achieve.

Schools tackling early school leaving should raise money to get fundamental tools like digital devices, comfortable and welcoming rooms, or appropriate spaces where students can meet, socialize or do leisure activities. Families and local institutions should be involved in this task.

Session of questions and feedback from the partners

Enric Ortega (Florida) asks about the organisation of cooperative groups in classes with a large number of students. Also in Spain classes have about 35 students. He wants also to know if the school can benefit from an external support.

Lucia Nicolai (CIPAT) answers that in Italy classes usually have about 28 - 30 students and it is difficult to divide them into groups. Mauro Di Grazia (CIPAT) adds that in some schools teachers can sometimes have a reduction of their school hours. In this way two teachers can work in the same class in order to carry out group work by using also ICT.

Teachers' opinions

Italian teachers (USRV)

Daniela Perotto (USRV) first thanks the Romanian group for their participation in the forum discussion.

As far as module five on external support and cooperation, Daniela Perotto (USRV) points out once more how important experience is since every school draws upon external support agencies which vary from area to area, but also within the same area, from school to school.

In her school (IPSIA "C. Scarpa") we have been working at three projects. The first was planned in cooperation with the local authority, the Youth Affairs and Urban Centre in our municipality of Montebelluna. The second is the result of a number of schools cooperating on the web, 'la rete', it's called *'Scuola a colori'* or 'full colour school'. The third is what we call *' Alternanza scuola lavoro'*. The school cooperates with private companies and local authorities in order to provide the students with an apprenticeship experience. Even though the last project is not openly related to the problem of early school leaving, it has a high impact on motivation as well as enhancing job opportunities in the local economy.

'Drop out' project

The project started in 2011 when the local authorities came to grips with the rising number of young people not employed and outside the education or training system. The phenomenon was clearly due to the economical crisis whose effect was mainly striking young people with very low educational profile. Our school was clearly identified, being it a vocational school, as the one with the highest number of students at risk. The aim of the project was and still is motivating students to stay in the class, but at the same time, teachers need to become aware of the main reasons for dropping out. An external perspective inevitably brings new light to the vision of a teacher, often stressed out when trying to manage very difficult groups of students. Our teacher and social educators agreed on how to intervene and identified four actions to be taken in order to achieve their aims.

1- Informative journeys with classes

After choosing seven class groups, some of the most difficult to manage, some qualified social workers met and worked with each group for a total of eight hours, split into two hours meetings. While talking with the students in their classrooms, the educator's aim was to spot the problems, evaluate possible causes and find solutions.

2- CIC (Centre for listening)

An external qualified operator enhanced the project which had already been run for some years, and tried to make it more effective and useful for the students.

3- Afternoon tuition.

At the Urban Centre, the local administration premises, a dedicated area was made available for the student's afternoon tuition on study methods. Unfortunately the turnout was so low that it made clear how motivation is a key element in early school leaving. In spite of the efforts made in trying to give students some extra tools to succeed, they showed very little interest.

4- Weekly monitoring

The purpose of the weekly monitoring is to support teachers in their analysis of the difficulties with students and the monitoring of the class groups involved in action 1. As a whole the project showed its

relevance in trying to identify the identity card of a student at risk and spot cases before the early school leaving when it is still possible to intervene with success.

Scuola a Colori

This project was first thought keeping in mind the high number of immigrant students in the classrooms of our school as well as most of the vocational schools in the area. It started last year when a group of teachers thought integration had become an urgent matter and its main aim was and is to plan activities to promote intercultural skills and competences. Some of the activities include walks in the surrounding area, sport activities, watching films and welcoming activities for new students. Afternoon courses of Italian as L2 are run for different proficiency levels. The long list of activities help new students to get involved in the school life and become active part of it since immigrant students often become interpreters for new students and their families. Isolation and cultural barriers are among the main causes of drop out.

Session of questions and feedback from the partners

Lucia Nicolai (CIPAT) asks about the procedures the school can use to evaluate the "Alternanza scuola lavoro" experiences.

Daniela Perotto (USRV) gives the floor to Mirko Pizzolato, representative of the social cooperative "Il Sestante" and coordinator of the "Drop out" project. He says that it is quite difficult to answer to this question. Before answering he wants to give some information on the project coordinated by his organisation. The project was jointly designed and it was aimed to help youth at risk. The vocational school "C. Scarpa" and the social cooperative have supported them in choosing other possible alternatives in case of early school leaving. The project started one year ago and so currently it is not possible to make an evaluation.

Daniela Perotto (USRV) points out that teachers cannot work alone and they need the support of external experts who can provide different points of view and cooperate with them. When in the class there are students that behave very badly, the teacher needs to find out another way to go through. Cooperation can be a good solution.

Lucia Nicolai (CIPAT) asks if companies certify the internship and thus the student can put this experience in his/her curriculum.

Daniela Perotto (USRV) specifies that the students get a certification and the internship experience can be included in their personal curriculum.

Lucia Nicolai (CIPAT) is interested in knowing if the student has a real opportunity to stay in the company and get a job after the internship.

Daniela Perotto (USRV) says that nowadays due to the financial crisis it is difficult to get a job and students are aware of this. Unfortunately they don't have a strong motivation to continue the learning pathway since they believe that the school doesn't give them real opportunities to access the labour market. Mirko Pizzolato adds that after the internship in the company students prefer sometimes to come back to school!!!

Teachers' opinions

Spanish teachers (Florida)
Enric Ortega summarises the results of the meeting with Spanish teachers.

The external support and cooperation is a very important factor to get the educational objectives as a community. We have to recognize that if our aim is to educate integral persons with all their needed competences to be able to live with all their options in this changing environment, this is not just a fact that has relation with school, this is a fact that has to be a matter of the entire community. So, as far as we can go with the cooperation with external participants, it will make this aim easier.

The module 5 has some good examples to help on this way. The methodologies talking about the videos are quite interesting, but the videos should be translated to the national languages to make them practical.

Also interesting the last part talking about the steps to follow when we recognize a risk: indicators. But this is difficult to carry on if the community has not defined this scenarios with the cooperants. In this way, we have participated in another European project that has been trying to define the ways of creating clusters to improve the external collaboration to help students at risk. This project was called "It-Clex" and has some interesting materials that can be good ideas for our project. The project web site is "http://www.itclex.eu/index.php/es/".

In our school, at this moment, we are working in a project that is called "Interactive groups" and is a way of trying to improve the external co-operation, in this case, co-operation from the families of the students. As all we now, the situation about job facilities in Spain (and many other European countries) is very difficult at this moment and so, we have many students' familiars that are unemployed. What we are doing in this project is to organize groups of people that want to help some hours on school and they came in the moment that they are free and help teachers on class. Obviously, teachers have to prepare tasks (normally group tasks) to make that easier.

The steps that we have followed are:

1. We send a letter to families asking if they would like to participate on our project
2. We make a meeting with them explaining the project characteristics
3. We recollect the times when these familiars can help
4. We organize a time-table trying to link their able times with the school needs

In parallel we followed another process with teachers:

1. We decided in which ages we could start with this project
2. We decided in which subjects we want to start with this project
3. We decided how many hours per week we are going to use on this project per subject
4. We make a meeting with the teachers to explain the aims of the project
5. We asked teachers if they would like to have some helpers on class
6. We decided the kind of activities we have to organize to make this project practical

Finally we are going to use this 'helpers' on group activities for the course of 1st ESO (12 years) with subjects like Language, Math, Science for 1 hour per week.

Our idea is to make this project growing up with other helpers, not just familiars, with the propose of making a Learning Community on our school.

Session of questions and feedback from the partners

Daniela Perotto (USRV) asks about the criteria to choose the parents that should help and support the students in the classroom. Moreover she wants to know if till now Florida had any problems with the parents being part of the didactic approach.

Enric Ortega (Florida) specifies that this project involving parents will officially start after Easter holidays. The criteria to choose the parents are the following: 1) they should be willing to participate and so they have to be motivated; 2) it is necessary to fix the number of hours for their support 3) they have to cooperate only in those classes where the teacher is really interested in their help 4) the parents cannot cooperate in the same class of their son/daughter.

Julien Keutgen (Inforef) asks if this project will last only one year and if Florida has already decided the type of activities parents will be involved in.

Enric Ortega (Florida) confirms that the project will start after Easter and parents' supporting activities will be associated only to specific subjects like maths, sciences, social sciences, etc. Teachers are free to decide the procedures to carry out the group work. After this partial experience the project will start again at the beginning of the next school year. The idea is to involve not only parents but also other social parts of the local community (for example university students or people in retirement).

Daniela Perotto (USRV) asks another question: since she has been working with cooperative groups in her classroom, she wants to know if Florida has referred to any specific area of the cooperative work or didactic approach.

Enric Ortega (Florida) specifies that they have followed a specific theoretical approach. In Spain several authors and pedagogues have dealt with this topic.

Julien Keutgen (Inforef) wants to know if there are many parents who are willing to participate and if the local bodies give any funds to support the initiative.

Enric Ortega (Florida) says that actually there are about 20 relatives who are willing to participate. The real problem deals with the school timetable since most of relatives would like to give their help in the afternoon but school lessons are mainly held in the morning. With regard to the second question Enric Ortega (Florida) points out that no funds are given by local authorities and people voluntarily work.

Teachers' opinions

Italian teachers (Datini)

General appreciation of the making/use of the videos and the various situations of risk they present. In the Cipat/Datini workshop new videos were shown of different kinds:

- Institutional videos: produced by local bodies – Regions, Counties

- Scenes from real films having "School" as their main topic – Italian, French etc

- School produced videos on the topic

At the end a guided analysis of the videos was produced.

The teachers who have participated in the workshops knew the problem of early school leaving and therefore have first of all socialized in the group their personal experiences as far as how to fight the problem together and/ or individually.

They have agreed on the usefulness of the different approaches suggested in Module 5, emphasizing, at the same time, the difficulty to interact effectively with the students' families and the difficulty in performing a recovery or motivational action in particularly big classes or in too many classes as teachers of those classes .

The commitment of the teacher often does not achieve success for the above mentioned reasons, and because most of the work is left, most of the time, to the teacher's own good will, without a general project really shared by the whole class teachers group, or because the specific knowledge needed to deal with such delicate matters affecting teen students is often missing.

A new kind of APPROACH is necessary: it must take into consideration the digital technologies and a greater interaction between all components of the educational process:

- teachers

- school management

- families

- local institutions.

Teachers have also complained about the lack of adequate facilities to accommodate pupils in need, so that they can see the school as a friendly environment where they can live part of their daily life, meet mates and teachers and acquire new skills at the same time.

Session of questions and feedback from the partners

With regard to videos Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) asks if Datini intends to use the videos also with students at risk.

Paola Bertini (Datini) specifies that one of the educational products to be elaborated in WP5 will be a video shot by students attending one of the school involved in the Stay@School project. Teachers have collected information about some students' personal stories and the video will describe these peculiar situations. Some guidelines will be also attached as a support for teachers who want to show the video in the classroom.

Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) asks about the use of digital technologies to help students at risk and the possible benefits.

Paola Bertini (Datini) answers that digital technologies are used as a support, for example on-line courses to involve students who are not usually interested in traditional lessons. ICT can help the teacher in presenting the topic in a more appealing way.

Since families play an important role Elza Gheorghiu (EuroEd) wants to know how they are involved in their children's education and if they help the teachers.

Paola Bertini (Datini) says that it is very difficult to involve families. They usually talk with teachers only if it is urgent or the student is really at risk. The school tries to involve them by phone calls but in vocational schools parents are almost absent. Due to the financial crisis parents have no time to come to school and they don't consider education & training as the main matter.

Conclusion

Daniela Perotto (USRV) closes the virtual meeting since all presentations have been made. She thanks the participants for their contributions since the session has been very interesting and useful. Exchanging ideas among teachers and experts brings always something new that can be later applied in the class.