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Supporting teachers' and parents' partnerships through social-networking technologies

IMPLEMENTING SCHOOL ACTION PLANS

E-STEP Pilot Schools implement Social Media Tools in Real Environments

E-STEP implemented the proposed Training Framework for teachers, school managers and school ICT experts via face-to-face and online workshops in order to engage parents in schooling, through social networking technologies effectively. The produced school action plans are further implemented by the pilot schools in real environments.

Design and implementation of school-based activities

One of the key findings of the needs analysis of E-STEP was that "teachers' individual attitudes and skills cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall school ethos: Any intervention or training on effectively engaging the parents should be placed within a wider whole school strategy for developing a school ethos that values parental engagement and the training should also move to this direction. All staff within a school, regardless of role, needs to be committed to and trained to engage effectively and productively with parents".

E-STEP project School Action Plan
This Action Plan is addressed to schools that participate in the E-STEP project and is intended to help you design an activity or series of activities in your school in order to actively engage pupils' parents. Please go through it and work on it with the rest of your peers and the head of the school and then complete the following fields.

It was also evident from the findings that any attempt to engage the parents or any form of parental engagement should be context-specific for each school and that not one approach fits all. In view of these findings the implementation of school-based activities in the pilot schools is planned to follow a participatory design approach, in which the teachers and heads of schools will assess their own school needs and design a plan of action for implementing parental engagement activities that suit their own school context.

School Action Plan

Each participated school in training workshop obtained the basic knowledge and skills in order to design an effective Action Plan including activities for parents' engagement.

It should be noted that the completion of such an action plan can was a demanding task for schools, since it required collaborative work among the participating staff members of the school. The partners ensured that all the necessary support will be given to the schools, so that they work on the action plans effectively and in a meaningful way.

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Lifelong Learning Programme

Workshops and Ideas about Implementing School Action Plans

Teachers' and school managers' meet together to learn about parental engagement and the E-STEP Training Framework. The training workshops were implemented in two phases. In the phase A each partner had to train 15 teachers from 5 schools and in phase B 60 teachers from 20 schools. The trainees (teachers) afterwards they had to create a school action plan which they would try to implement in their school environment. Below you can see some workshops which organized during the implementation phase of the provided Training Framework.

Training Workshops in Greece

In Greece 6 separate training workshops were realized with great success. An indicative Phase B workshop was organized on Tuesday, March 31 2015 in Athens, Pallini, at the premises of Ellinogermaniki Agogi. Fifteen teachers from 7 E-STEP schools participated, representing Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education. The schools were the 2nd Nursery School of Zefyri, the Junior High School of Kampos Chiou, the 9th Junior High School of Acharnes, the 3rd Primary School of Lavrio, the Junior High School of Lechena, the 3rd Junior High School of Nea Philadelphia and the Junior High School of Kato Tithorea. An interesting remark was that the representa-

tion of Secondary Education teachers was higher that from Primary, showing that teachers are still interested in engaging the parents of older pupils. The participants also represented different geographical and social contexts, which included schools in underprivileged areas as well as schools in more privileged ones. During the workshop the teachers had the opportunity to exchange ideas, experiences and perceptions about the concepts of parents' collaboration, communication and engagement. The ODS platform was demonstrated as a tool to be used for the teachers' interaction with parents. Overall, there was consensus among the participants that in order for parental engagement to be fruitful for the school and the pupils the roles of each side should be clear, as well as the boundaries. It was also stressed that the pupils should be the final beneficiaries of any sort of teachers' and parents' partnership.

Training Workshops in Austria

In Austria a total of 9 workshops was realized from which two where organized as online work-

shops in the second implementation phase.

One training workshop of Phase B was attended by teachers and the school principal at the primary school VS Trautmannsdorf a.d. Leitha in Upper Austria on the 26th of March 2015. After analysing the needs of the school the trainees designed a rough concept of the school action plan. The telephone tree, which has been used in emergency cases in the past, has been most of the times proved ineffective. Therefore the school staff proposed the texting method for a better and faster communication between teachers and parents. Each teacher and the school director should install a "Group SMS" App, which is available for free for different platforms (Android, iPhone, iPad, etc.). The teacher is the administrator of the group, which consist of all parents of their own class. In parallel the school principal should be given the possibility to join all the groups for global events and information flow.

Another training workshop took place online in Austria on the 29th of April 2015. The participating schools were the secondary

vocational school BHAS Oberpullendorf, the secondary schools NMS Großwarasdorf and NMS Oberpullendorf, and the private secondary school NMS Marianum Steinberg all from Burgenland. Interested teachers and the heads of some schools discussed about the signification of the national learning platform (LMS.at) for the involvement and training of parents. On this platform, information to recurrent questions and problem solutions can be retrieved and entered automatically. The LMS.at platform should be expanded therefore into an interactive communication and information platform for parents. In further development it should be used for communication between teachers and parents. The new communication technologies and social media will enable parents to support the learning process of their children more effectively. The challenge is to initiate this type of communication and make it so that parents recognize the benefits and also accept them.

Training workshops in UK

Representatives from participating schools working with Birmingham City University met on 1st December 2014 to interact with and discuss the E-STEP framework and materials. BCU started with a screening of the E-STEP video in which two of the schools are featured talking about their very positive experiences of in-

volvement with the project. Colleagues used the creative methods activity to reflect upon and discuss current attitudes and values in relation to parental engagement in their own setting and to consider the role social media plays in supporting interaction between home and school.

BCU team also used the twitter feed #ESTEP_EU to share its work with the wider school communities. Each school representative will now lead an action planning session in their own context and BCU team will be meeting with the BCU team again in early February to share their emerging action plans so as to produce a series of case study examples to support schools involved in the Phase B pilot activity.

Training Workshops in Bulgaria

The first phase E-STEP workshops in Bulgaria for encouraging the use of social networks in communication between school and parents took place in Sofia.

The first one was held in Second Secondary Schools "Academician Emillian Stanev" on the 19th of November (Wednesday) and was

attended by 27 teachers and managing staff, including the school director and the deputy directors. The workshop was conducted in live discussion format where different teachers shared freely their opinion and experience on the topics discussed, proposed ways to facilitate exchange of information between parents and teachers and made suggestions how to start their implementation plan for the project participation. Teachers marked on a sheet of paper their preferred social networks and shared positive experience of using online technologies like e-diary for communicating with parents.

The second workshop took place in "Elisaveta Bagryana" 51st Secondary School of Arts and Computer Design on the next day 20th of November (Thursday) with the same lecturers. There were 25 teachers from the school including the deputy directors Mrs. Diana Gorcheva and Mrs. Larissa Nesheva. During the workshop it was concluded that the school has serious experience in using social networks and almost every class has its own

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Facebook group and they use it on a regular basis. There were also several web sites belonging to different classes and traditions in innovative teaching, using different online resources and education portals. The teachers received some practical advice and live demonstration including ways to create alone a survey form using Google Drive and accompanying ecosystem toolset.

Training workshops in Ireland

The Irish workshops involved teachers from three levels of the educational system: pre-primary, primary and secondary level. The first workshop was held in Dublin in February, with subsequent workshops held in the following months up to May. Two of these were held in a central venue, and the balance was held on-site or via personal contact in telephone interview-style.

The workshops took the teachers through the training slides at their own pace. As numbers were limited or one-to-one this had the advantage of allowing for pauses and reflective time for discussion. Low numbers prevented extensive use of creative methodologies however, and affected creation of group synergy. However, the level of discussion was dynamic, open and honest with ample time available to focus on needs of each participant.

Many interesting and useful insights were shared on the various social media being used. Using text messages to communicate with parents was widespread.

This was used in some schools as a backup to notes home with the children, especially for important messages as the notes were often missed. One school reported that texts were a problem as some parents often changed numbers for various reasons. Using smartphones however was deemed really useful, with one teacher referring to them as 'technology in the pocket'. It reached parents instantly and directly. All agreed that overuse was not productive and text communications should be carefully considered.

In Ireland, the schools appear to be divided into those realising fully the potential of using social media to increase and develop meaningful parental engagement, and those schools still not gaining the benefit of proper focused use of ICT and social media. It is hoped that the continuing and future promotion of E-STEP will lessen this divide.

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International Professional Development Association, 29th November 2014, Birmingham

On 29th November BCU colleagues presented a session entitled "*Crossing boundaries and building communities: teacher learning about parental engagement, lessons from the ESTEP project*" at the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) Conference at Aston University in Birmingham. Delegates were interested in discussing the readiness of schools and teachers to make effective use of social media and the diversity of experience between schools across the partnership.
http://ipda.org.uk/event/2015-international-conference-professional-learning-for-performance/

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EDEN Annual Conference, 9-12 June 2015, Barcelona

E-STEP is participating to the annual **EDEN conference** from 9th to 12th June 2015 in Barcelona. The E-STEP consortium submitted a paper and will discuss the approach and first findings and results of the implementation phases. Conference link: **http://www.eden-online.org/2015_barcelona.html**

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Online interaction with parents

An important aspect of the implementation is the online interaction among the pilot schools and the parents which is planned to take place through the Open Discovery Space portal, within a digital community that has been developed for this purpose
http://portal.opendiscoveryspace.eu/community/teachers-and-parents-collaborativecommunity-669875 .

This online community building between school staff and parents will take into consideration issues of access, reach, privacy, as well as the ability to transfer communication and collaboration to an online environment and tackle any further issues that may arise there.

Flourishing teacher-parent communities evolve over a period of time to include members that exhibit a sense of belonging, often based on shared beliefs on what constitutes an appropriate educational approach and on the role of the modern pedagogue as an agent and initiator of knowledge, as well as the role of the modern parent who has the ability to support the work of the teacher and contribute considerably to the education of young learners. According to Widenman (2010) "The Members of successful learning communities demonstrate a shared focus and common purpose in their community activities. Members interact within a well-defined domain of interest to foster mutual growth (Carr & Chambers, 2006). This development of a common focus has been found to be a key requisite for success in all of the reviewed studies".

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Open Classroom Conference, 18-21 September 2015, Athens, Greece – Call for Contributions

The co-organised **Open Discovery Space** conference in the series of EDEN Open Classroom Conferences has the scope of "Transforming Schools into Innovative Learning Organisations" and is also the final conference of the E-STEP project.
The deadline for submission is 1 July for papers and 15 August for Synergy formats:
http://www.eden-online.org/eden-events/open-classroom-conferences/athens2015.html#call

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D4Learning 2015, 17-20 November 2015, Aalborg, Denmark – Call for Papers

The first D4Learning international conference on "Innovations with Digital Learning for Inclusion " (D4L) is held in collaboration with the EDENs conference series of Open Classroom with focus on distance education and new technologies in school level education and training. The D4L conference serves as a forum for the discussion and exchange of information on the research, development, and applications on all topics related to the use of digital technology for inclusion. **http://www.d4l.aau.dk/call-for-papers/**

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Video on Parental Engagement and the Use of Social Media

The video produced by the Birmingham City University (BCU) shows ideas on the use of social media in schools to foster and improve parental engagement.
See the video on YouTube: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Kt2UfHbRyY**

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Parents Academy

In order to motivate the online interaction between parents and teachers, the partners need to develop an approach that demonstrates the value of using such a Web 2.0 tool for the promotion of parent-teacher collaboration. Providing to parents and teachers interesting material on contemporary related issues (such as internet safety, bullying, etc.), as well as innovative good practices and ideas has the potential to attract the interest of targeted stakeholders. Such material is already available on the ODS portal, in a section called "Parents' academy" **http://portal.opendiscoveryspace.eu/parents-academy** and will be also introduced to the pilot schools so that they promote this to the parents.

Supporting materials and services for schools

Trainer's and Trainee's Guides

The trainees guide accompanies the E-STEP training framework and is supported by a trainer's guide and a suite of learning activities. Together these resources will support schools to develop, implement and evaluate strategies to engage parents more actively and effectively in the work of your school through use of social networking technologies. Further information at E-STEP website under **http://www.estep-project.eu/?page_id=257** (see D2.2 Initial Trainees' Guide）

e-Twinning Kit

The E-STEP project prepares also an "e-twinning Kit" that will be made available for future use for schools participating in e-twinning projects.
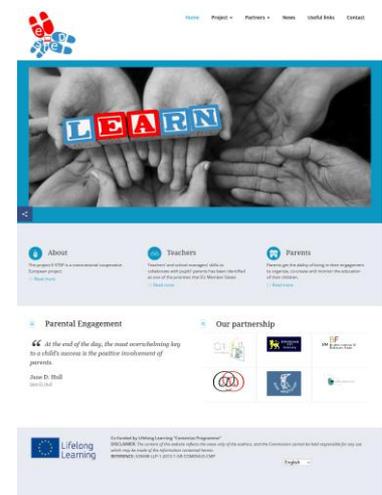
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