



Evaluation

**Internet Radio
as Learning Tool**

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September 2008

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Preface

The project Internet Radio as a Learning Tool has been an overall success, and successfully concluded with the creation of the Starter-Kit, which is now available to anyone who is interested. Although the project faced some difficulties, particularly in organization and transnational communication, these issues did not prevent the project from achieving what it set out to accomplish. In general, both students and educators gained valuable multicultural experiences and increased their knowledge in many areas, including technology, international cooperation, and the English language.

Oxford Research has functioned as external evaluator to the project from October 2006 till August 2008. This evaluation report is based on monthly questionnaires, interviews with key persons and general desk research.

Content of the project

Background

Vocational colleges and universities are the suppliers of future employees of industry, craft, and public management, and their students should be prepared for growing IT demands. The students need to master new technologies, and they need to develop their competences in order to achieve creative, innovative, efficient and critical use of modern IT tools.

In recent years, internet-radio has become easily accessible via podcasting technology, and the production of internet-radio has become practicable for the average user. This new technology opens up a range of possibilities for teachers and students. The goal of the project 'Internet Radio as Learning Tool' is to broaden the technical, personal and cross-cultural consciousness for the participating students and thereby contribute through these competences to their future careers. Hopefully, the students can achieve an impact on business in general through these abilities.

The application of information technologies within daily life, in industry, and as a platform for international communication, is developing incredibly fast. There is a particular need for tools and assistance when vocational teachers wish to implement new information technology as a learning media. The project was sponsored by the Leonardo da Vinci program of the European Commission and was partially self-financed by the partners of the project.

Target groups (participants)

The primary target groups for the outcome of this project were teachers and education planners at institutions for vocational education and training (VET), such as vocational colleges, technical universities and business schools. The secondary target group was institutions for VET teacher training. However, primary and secondary schools as well as university faculties in general might be interested for pedagogical and communication reasons.

The participants in the project were essentially made up of the project leaders, who aside from their role as teachers also took upon themselves the administrative role, other educators whose focus was primarily in the classroom, and the students who actually completed the tasks and created the podcasts. These participants were made up of people from four different countries, namely Denmark, Germany, Hungary, and Turkey.

Participating organizations

The participating organizations are as follows:

Educational organizations:

- Vocational College Hansenberg, Kolding, Denmark

- Vocational College Valckenburgschule, Ulm, Germany
- Budai Highschool, Budapest, Hungary
- Mugla University, Turkey
- The Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers, Århus, Denmark
- European School Head Association

Radio partners:

- Danmark's Radio DR, Denmark
- Radio Free FM, Germany
- SAH Radio, Turkey
- Radio Petöfi, Hungary

Developing methods

The methodology behind the project is primarily rooted in educational techniques, and therefore focused on the teaching and implementation of the skills needed to create podcasts and eventually a starter-kit. Students were taught the correct methods to use when interviewing a person of interest for a podcast, as well as the techniques needed for using the technology that was an integral aspect of the project.

Vocational institutions and radio stations from the four countries worked together cross-nationally in order to fulfill the project's final goal: The production and publication of a starter-kit for a teaching module, containing tools for working with internet radio in vocational training institutions. Several organizations assisted with consultancy on:

- Teacher training
- Evaluation methods
- A common European point of view

For further details see www.i-radio-school.eu.

Results

Progress of the project

The educational organizations participating in the project have received a monthly questionnaire every month. The questionnaire was answered between 7 and 16 times by the involved organizations. The monthly questionnaire was handed in until January 2008 for most partners.

As a result of the overall success and satisfying progress of the project it was decided that it was not necessary to gather monthly questionnaires for monitoring purposes in the concluding months of the project.

The questionnaire contained questions in regard to web-activities, the starter-kit, valorisation activities and the organizational setup. The monthly questionnaire functioned partly as process monitoring.

In regard to undertaken **web-activities** all four educational organizations have constructed a web-site. The organizations had their websites up and running very quickly after the project began. Two organizations had their websites ready in January 2007, the two other in March 2007. From the two schools that have registered hits and downloads on the website, it can be seen that the amount of hits and downloads varies a lot. Downloads vary up to 147 and hits vary from 20 to 2953 hits pr. month.

Data shows that **newsletters** to external subscribers have been produced, as well as local newsletters. Furthermore, two educational organizations had produced blogs in January 2008.

All four educational organizations have uploaded **student-produced broadcasts**. The amount of uploads varies from 3 to 50 uploads pr. month. The average downloads also vary a lot between educational organizations. In the two organizations that reported repeatedly on uploads, the average is respectively 9 uploads and 20 uploads pr. month.

On average, 15 students participated in a teaching module pr. month across the four educational organizations. The maximum of participants reached 26 students. The amount of teachers that participate in a teaching module as teachers varied with a maximum of 10 teachers pr. month.

When we turn to the **Valorisation activities** undertaken the following conclusions can be made:

- Personal meeting with decision makers and/or key persons within VET were undertaken 68 % of the months where the questionnaire was answered
- All project partners have participated in conferences and/or seminars. These activities took place 52 % of the months where the questionnaires were handed in.
- Marketing/presentations efforts were made in 43 % of the month where data is available. The institutions used broadcasts, presentation for teachers, interviews, articles, papers and software programmes in the marketing effort.
- Support of other institutions in initiating projects with Internet radio has been most evident in Turkey and Denmark.

- In regard to the **organizational set up**, the projects have mobilized several external partners over the 17 months of data-gathering. Most partners are radio stations and educational institutions, but production companies, media bureaus and experts have also participated in the project. Especially Mugla University, Turkey has been very active in regard to cooperation with external partners. Also Denmark has initiated contact with a range of European key persons.

Pedagogical results

The new teaching method was implemented at each of the vocational partner institutions. The teaching module was elaborated and adapted to each school's framework and their educational system's curriculum.

Teacher evaluations and student evaluations were run with the following results:

- High degree of student motivation
- Strengthened student team work
- Students achieved awareness of their own learning results: quality of process and product
- Teachers supported the student's personal development through expansion beyond the school's traditional frames through interview, cooperation with radio stations and publishing their productions
- Teachers widened their IT competence
- Improvement of the teacher's new role as a consultant
- Increased interdisciplinary teaching with common subjects, technical subjects and IT

External products and results

Website

The website opened in winter 2006/2007 and contains common pages in English as well as partner countries' pages in German, Danish, Hungarian and Turkish. The website was promoted through folders and at conferences in each country and through channels from European School Head Association. Besides this there is the possibility of subscribing to newsletters. Since summer 2007, there has been between 5.000-10.000 click per month. Furthermore, the website was the indicator of the project to win European Schoolnet's Golden Prize. The Danish vocational college Hansenberg will continue keeping the website open for the public and for free access. It is not yet clear, how long it will be continuously updated, but new audio projects will be promoted here

Interdisciplinary teaching module

As an introduction to the project, teachers from the project's VET institutions were trained in teaching with MP3's and internet-radio broadcasts. Local radio stations supported this training with professional radio journalists. An interdisciplinary teaching module of about 4 weeks was the result of the four countries' preparations. This module was implemented through local trial runs with students in the summer of 2007. These trial runs were evaluated in October 2007, in order to develop the final teaching module. During the trial run, teachers and students produced sound files and radio broadcasts. These productions covered a wide range of issues, such as working environment, solar energy, immigration, global changes, interview at a rock festival, etc.

Cross-national radio broadcast

During the winter of 2007, one common cross-national radio broadcast was produced by teachers and students and published as a 13-episode-podcast during spring of 2008. It contained elements from students' broadcasts, teachers' pedagogical reflections, discussions of technical experiences and practical advice.

Starter-kit

A Starter-Kit, or a toolbox for the implementation of Internet radio as a learning tool, was produced as a CD-ROM with 2.500 copies, and published at the project's website. The starter-kit contains:

1. Technical advice
2. Pedagogical advice
3. Journalistic advice
4. Cases and sound samples

It was distributed in the partner countries and to the EU's ministries of education between June and September 2008, with positive feedback and reorders from recipients.

Great international interest for the project

The project gained a great amount of national and international publicity with articles in magazines, newspapers and websites, as well as radio broadcasts and presentations at conferences, schools etc. From October 2006 to April 2008, there were both television and radio broadcasts in Denmark, Turkey, Hungary and Germany with the project's participants about the project. The project was also honoured with the European Schoolnet Prize in 2007 for innovativeness and cooperation.

Lastly, new national and transnational projects have been initiated, and new schools have become involved, including non-VET institutions within youth education.

Internal results

The project has resulted in a well-established transnational partnership, which is continuing with a new common pilot project. Furthermore, the mobility of students was initiated or greatly increased in each of the four VET partners.

The VET partners have documented their results internally through evaluations. The results have been made visible during the process and were also made public by the individual schools. These results led to an increased acceptance of and focus on international activities by the schools' leaders.

All VET partners continue working with one or more aspects of the project. The Turkish University partner has even incorporated Internetradio/podcasting into their official curriculum-based programme.

Valorization

What can be learned from the project?

While the project was considered to be an overall success, as with all new endeavors there were both positive and negative factors that emerged.

Benefits

New technological skills

Due to the technological nature of the project, new skills were required by both the students and the teachers in order for success to be achieved. The project encouraged both active and future vocational teachers to develop their technological competences, analyze their students' learning styles, and apply computer-based teaching together with sound as a teaching and learning tool. Because of this, both teachers and students experienced an increase in technical competence through their work with Podcasts and audio/mp3 files. This new technical competence was not only important for the success of this individual project, but provided a skill that they will be able to utilize in many other areas of modern life, and that will remain relevant for years to come.

Motivation

Student evaluations also show that Internetradio work is a highly motivating factor, which is usually a strong indicator of the prevention of drop-outs. However, more precise results on drop-out prevention have not been measured.

Understanding of foreign cultures

In addition to this, both teachers and students experienced an increase in their understanding of foreign cultures and their ability to cooperate internationally. Due to the transnational nature of the project, both teachers and students gained awareness of other cultures through constant contact with international participants. This international cooperation exposed participants to new ideas and methodologies that can be used in the future for other similar projects or in their professional life.

Better language skills

In addition, for the educators in particular, English was the common language among the four nations, and therefore they gained constant practice in English verbal communication and written skills. This naturally led to an improvement in their English competence, and thus an increase of their ability to contribute to English language projects and other future instances of international cooperation.

Larger network

Since running an international project potentially gives much prestige, there was a certain focus on the project in each VET institution. The project partners could support each other across the borders when meeting barriers in their own organization. Since radio partners were involved, it was a natural choice to profile the project through these channels. The international aspect made the project particularly attractive for the press. The

project also increased international awareness of DEL, and through this DEL gained new contacts and thus new international possibilities for the future.

Possible improvements

Coordination

Although the new and international nature of the program created benefits for the participants, it also meant that communication, organization, and publicity was more difficult. Overall, there were difficulties in communication due to the far distances between participants and the different languages that were natively spoken. Due to this, Skype meetings were difficult to organize and there was not enough communication by mail among students. Furthermore, reports and documents from the leaders and educators were sometimes not sent when they should have been, or at all, and this sometimes created a sense of confusion and disconnectedness. This lack of clear communication created an environment that sometimes was more akin to four separate projects rather than four countries collaborating as one.

Organizational challenges

The reality of maintaining a project in four different countries also meant that organization was very important, and many of the leaders felt that in this case it was not up to par. The quality of the results of the project depended heavily on organization beforehand, and this naturally took a lot of time and dedication that was only possible with a high degree of motivation and investment of the participants' own free time. For educators this was difficult, as they had many other duties at the school, and when the timetables of different partners were not equal, it created frustration. Also, the time schedule was extremely tight and this was not respected by some of the participants. Some of the participants were forced to spend time writing and calling partners because the delivery of documents had passed the deadline. This lack of respect for the established deadlines created unnecessary uncertainty and prevented the process from running smoothly.

Transnational production

In addition to this, the transnational production on the part of the students did not succeed to the extent that it could have done. The communication and organizational issues mentioned above were largely to blame, but also the fact that the project was fairly centralized, as it was primarily steered out of Denmark, and an increased support from national facilitators could have improved this.

Suggestions for the future

Based on the issues mentioned above, suggestions have been made for improving projects in the future.

First, there is a **need for upholding of deadlines**. Specifically, an established time schedule needs to be agreed upon by all participants before the advent of the project, and this schedule must be respected and followed. This includes meeting all deadlines on time, establishing specific times for Skype meetings, and efficiently responding to all emails. Documents must be delivered in English on the date they are due, and all agreements must be fulfilled. This increase in communication and adherence to the schedule

would greatly decrease confusion and would create a clearer and more effective system for all people involved.

Furthermore, publicity can be increased through even **more media exposure** and active advertisement. This would not only increase interest from colleagues and other schools and organizations, but would also assist in providing an incentive for those involved to be committed and enthusiastic. In regard hereto it should be mentioned that the project did get a lot of media attention.

Project evolution and the spread of knowledge

Inspiration for a new project

The partnership of the VET school partners will continue in a new pilot project including Germany, Denmark, Turkey, and a new Spanish VET institution. Unfortunately, Hungary does not have the teaching resources for a new project, but will follow the results as much as possible in the position of a silent partner. The European School Head Organization has also been pleased with the cooperation, since the results are transferrable to their other members, and the Danish teacher training organisation DEL has been a competent project consultant and will also support the new project.

The radio partners' role has expired. They may become involved sporadically when their expertise matches new activities. Cooperation with the German independent radio station Free FM and the Turkish commercial Sah Radio have been especially productive, and contact with them will be kept.

Continuous work with MP3's for teaching and learning

In each of the countries, the partners will continue their work with MP3's for teaching and learning. For example:

- German Valckenburgschule is continuously working with podcasting in the subject "Global Studies." They have made appointments with other Danish schools concerning exchange on this issue, including a possible student exchange program.
- Turkish Mugla University has integrated podcasting into their curriculum based standard program. New students have chosen the subject for their studies.
- Teachers from the Hungarian Budai High School keep on exploring project-based teaching as a teaching form and offer training for their colleagues.
- Danish vocational college Hansenberg and DEL have several common projects that include MP3's, such as a project involving sound artists.
- In Denmark the new 2008 curricula for media graphic educations include work with MP3 and podcasting productions. (The Danish vocational college Hansenberg had its department "media graphic educations" involved in the project).

The partners will continue their cooperation in a new project that will explore other media's potentials for teaching and learning processes. It is called "Distance learning for Apprentices," and is intended to begin in October 2008.

Barriers in regard to valorization

The difficulties outlined below are all barriers that the project faced during its span, and are issues that could also cause difficulties in the future for other principal organizers who might be interested in participating or conducting a similar project. When considering taking inspiration from this project, these are all issues that should be considered beforehand in order to prevent parallel difficulties.

Logistical problems

The partners experienced differences in the schools' time schedules as a continuing problem, which made it rather difficult and often impossible to work synchronically across the borders (lessons, holidays, examinations, etc.).

The partners chose to work asynchronously, when even long-term planning could not facilitate parallel work. Fortunately, an exchange of the work products became easy when a common transnational server space was established. Here huge audio files could be stored, up- and downloaded.

Personal communication across the countries between teachers and students (with communication tools like Skype etc.) had to be planned very carefully and with reliable appointments.

Technical difficulties

The technical solutions that were chosen in the project, worked out quite well in general. However, there were local problems that required third part assistance.

Language problems

The common project language was English, and the key participants in the project were able to speak and write. However, in Turkey, Hungary and up to a certain degree in Germany, some team members did not master the English language. During transnational project meetings, their colleagues had to translate for them. Some of the final documents for the project's products were delivered in the original language, which was overcome by investing into external translations.

Deadlines

The commitment to deadlines was a never ending issue during the project. A lot of documents and productions had to be delivered, such as monthly reports for evaluation purpose, audio productions, pedagogical reflections, as well as administrative papers for accountancy etc. In order to reach the deadlines, the project lead and consultants had to steer the processes quite strictly and with great alertness. They did this through personal conversations and admonitions, switch of tasks and fields of responsibility, rescheduling time tables, and withholding payment.

Authority for the project's key persons

In each country, the project members had to struggle to gain attention and permissions within their own organizations. The relatively low salary ceilings and a lack of knowledge about international affairs might cause a certain distance between daily work at schools and international pilot projects. The project had difficulties in countries where decision makers were not directly part of the daily project. Achieving permission in certain cases or deviating from normal procedures in the school was a problem. It was not quite possible to overcome these difficulties, and this was felt to be a rather big problem for some of the project members. A few times the project lead and consultants had to intervene to clear up crucial questions, decisions and/or responsibilities.

Pedagogical difficulties

Since the project was a framework for innovative teaching and learning methods, varying difficulties occurred in each country, such as clashes with a traditional view on the teacher's role, limitations due to the schools' frameworks or curricula, etc.

These problems were overcome as a natural development during the project, by discussion in the working groups, finding pedagogically responsible solutions, and drawing sustainable conclusions. In this way, the cross-national interaction was very inspiring and helpful.

Evaluator's comments

It is clear that the project Internet Radio as Learning Tool has been an overall success. Creating a project that is so largely based on technology and education, with the added challenge of bridging the gap between four different cultures, languages, and educational systems, was not an easy feat to accomplish. In a globalized world, the importance of exposing students to foreign cultures and thereby creating interaction with students from other cultures cannot be overemphasized.

It is clear that in future endeavors, the commitment of project partners is essential. When operating with such great distances and cultural/lingual barriers, planning must be impeccable and the agreements must be followed for the project to run smoothly. This is also important to insure the value of the outcome, as well as the knowledge and experienced gained by both students and teachers.

Overall, it seems that the participants involved learned invaluable lessons, and this project can serve as inspiration to many of them for future educational development and progressive teaching methods in the future. Due to the fact that the project has gained interest from other schools and new possible participants, it is clear that the success of this project goes deeper than simply the accomplishment of their goal of producing the starter-kit. Rather, the true success lies in the fact that the project will live on in the minds of new educators, and will evolve and improve in a way as to assist in the creation of projects that are still to come.