Roundtable Session

Title: Learning through volunteering - an alternative way to reingage in education youngsters facing difficulties at school

General abstract of the presentation *(max. 150 words)*

presenting the outline of your (planned) research project or study and including the problem(s), question(s), dilemma's, and/or challenge(s) that you wish to discuss during your roundtable session

The research to be implemented by the Success at school through volunteering project (a Lifelong Learning project) is to offer an alternative learning approach, based on volunteering , to youngsters facing difficulties at school (or already drop outs). It combines both theroetical and practical approaches. A training programme addresses youngsters aged from 14 to 20 years in order to reingage them in education through volunteering both on a theoretical way (content, general knowledge) and practical way (how to concretely be involved in a voluntary action). The learning strategy should focus on the following topics: definition and framework of a voluntary involvement (where); role and status of a volunteer in an association/in society (who) ; the informal and non formal learning acquired thanks to a volunteering (what); the professional dimension of a volunteering (for what purpose) ; the social dimension (being a member of a group) and the cultural dimension (meeting people with different backgrounds) of a volunteering.

Detailed abstract

1. **What is the background of your (planned) research project, study or general problem that you wish to discuss? More specifically, how is your study or problem founded by theory and/or how does it originate from practice**? *(max. 200 words)*

The background of the research project is the lifelong learning programme under the sub-programme Comenius, focussed on primary and secondary education. School failure is a major cause of social and professional exclusion among youngsters. It is rare to meet pupils who would be totally opposed to school. Most of the time they are disillusioned and stressed by traditional teaching and feel they can not find their place within the existing schooling system. The main aim of the Success At School study is to expose youngsters affected by early school leaving to a pedagogical approach (an alternative one) involving youngsters in voluntary action and teaching them the main theoretical basis for them to be aware of a voluntary involvement. The SAS study will take the form of an applied study or "research action". It will experiment the training programme among youngsters facing difficulties at school and support mentors/educators working with them out of school (mainly in associations) in order to open perspectives for youngsters and develop their learning abilities, keeping in mind that the skills and competences acquired/developed thanks to this alternative method should be assessed at school. A bridge will be proposed between formal learning (at school) and informal/non formal learning (in voluntary organisations)

2. **Describe the general outline of your (planned) research project or study**, *and/or* **problem that you wish to discuss as much as possible, i.e. the research questions, research design, methods, timeline,...** *(max. 300 words)*

Volunteering is part of non-formal and informal learning enhanced by the Copenhagen process. Among an association, youngsters apply theoretical knowledge learned at school, enrich their social network, acquire or develop skills and competences, exchange good practices in learning. A voluntary experience enables youngsters to acquire and/or develop skills and competences that should be most useful for pupils affected by early school leaving and may enable their return to school: to organise themselves, to work with others, to build a project, to respect a timetable…. Moreover a project implemented in an association is a way to motivate a positive image of themselves, recover their self-esteem, develop a taste for learning (in a less academic form). A voluntary involvement may also be a useful experience for preparing them to think of a professional future, even to acquire a first "professional experience".

On the occasion of the European Year of Volunteering (Voluntary Activities promoting Active Citizenship 2011), the European Commission officially recognised volunteering as a creator of human and social capital. It is also a pathway to integration and employment and a key factor for improving social cohesion. The Council and the European Parliament adopted in 2006 a "European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning". They are the key competences that citizens should require for their personal fulfillment, social inclusion, active citizenship and employability in a knowledge-based society.

The research questions we would wish to discuss would be the following ones:

1. how to reingage youngsters facing difficulties at school thanks to a training programme combining both a theoretical part (knowledge) and practical approach (voluntary action)?

2. how to be convincing towards mentors/educators to implement this "innovative" training programme among this publics with "special needs" ?

3. how far can we expect that the skills/competences acquired or developed thanks to the training programme be recognised by teachers at school ?

3. **How is practice involved in your (planned) research project or study, and which kind of dissemination, implementation or other ways of sharing your research output are you thinking of in order to contribute to the improvement of educational practice and learning?** *(max. 150 words)*

In the Success at school through volunteering project, the training programme offered to youngsters facing difficulties at school (or already drop outs) together with the mentoring offered to mentors/educators working with them will be experimented in 6 different countries. The panel gathers countries with different backgrounds in terms of proportion of early school leavers (ESL) and tradition in volunteering : United Kingdom (high tradition of volunteering, 13.5% of ESL); France (medium-high tradition of volunteering ; 11.6 % of ESL) ; Bulgaria (low tradition of volunteering ; 1.5% of ESL) ; Slovenia (tradition of volunteering ; 4.4% of ESL) ; Italy (medium tradition of volunteering ; 17.6 % of ESL) and Portugal (low level of volunteering ; 20.8% of ESL). We will share our research inputs in publishing the reports of experimentation and/or articles on the results on the experimentation in the different countries (partners: Centre of Education, University of Northampton ; department of educational sciences, University of Bologna, Universitary Institute of Lisbon)

4. **Which question(s), problem(s) or challenge(s) would you like to present for discussion to the conference delegates? Limit yourself to 2 or 3 questions/problems/challenges, in order to be able to discuss them in-depth.**

 We would like to discuss with the conference delegates the following problems/challenges:

 1. how far should (or could) the education systems support the development of key competences for all young people (including drop outs) ?

2. how far the traditional school system would be ready to assess/value skills and competences acquired out of school (through volunteering)?

3. what could be the bridge to be built between school (secondary school as far as the SAS project is concerned) and the associations/not for profit organisations offering school mentoring in order to support early school leavers or youngsters facing difficulties at school ?

5.   List of references

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