CC PLATFORM - A DIGITAL INNOVATION AND COLLABORATIVE TOOL FOR TEACHERS.
ASPECTS OF ITS IMPACT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *At the end of the Consumer Classroom project, an impact assessment was carried out on some categories of people involved in education - students, future teachers, teachers, university teachers who train the future teachers, experts from the human resources centers or the training of the teaching staff. Thus, two activities were proposed, in two university centers in Romania. The result was that the CC platform is conducive to users - students, teachers and other categories - and it would be good if they addressed the primary cycle students as well.*

Key words: *Consumer Classroom e-learning Platform; its impact in education;*

Introduction

The Consumer Classroom project is a European Commission (EC) funded collaborative platform and multilingual website for teachers across the EU, launched on March 2013. Therefore it is a tool that provides a response to the new approaches towards consumer education.

Consumer Education is a sub-theme under Education for Sustainable Development. Thus, it is the preparation of individuals through skills, concepts and understanding that are required for everyday living to achieve maximum satisfaction and utilization of his/her resources in a sustainable way.

It consists on an interactive open multilingual platform for the on-line community of teachers of between 12 to 18 years old European schools and other stakeholders across Europe (experts in education or consumer issues, parents, etc.).

This initiative is a link between the Digital Agenda for Europe and the multiannual Consumer program as well as a link among the SDG4 (Sustainable Development Goal 4) on Quality Education, SDG12 on Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG13 on Climate Change action.

This platform is therefore part of the EC's active policy funded tools and is aligned with 2 main axes of the EC work in terms of Education for Sustainable Consumption:

a) the CHAFEA (Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency) and DG (Directorate-General) for Justice and Consumers Program and

b) the New Skills Agenda for Europe.

It plays a key role for both programs to achieve the following objectives:

1. knowledge-enhancing aspects of consumer empowerment;
2. the development of 21st century skills and competences;
3. innovating and modernizing education and training; and
4. open education.

This collaborative tool helps teachers and experts sharing experiences and creates joint projects with other teachers and experts, as well as with their students. The main objective of this aspect is encouraging inter-school multi-disciplinary projects and also offering teachers the opportunity to become a consumer education expert using the tools provided in this website.

Taking full advantage of the latest web technologies and community based Internet usage, Consumer Classroom provides ready-to-use teaching resources on a wide range of consumer education themes. Each school subject has elements on consumer education - from Literature, Mathematics or Financial Literacy to Home Economics, Sciences, Information and Communication, Sustainable Development, Social Media and Internet Safety and Languages – providing the necessary pedagogic tools to include this thematic area in the teachers' curricula.

The platform aims to provide better coordination and synergies with national efforts within the area of consumer education and provides a database with teaching/pedagogical resources on consumer education and its subthemes. Its main goal is to promote an understanding of the structures and systems within the market and to provide the necessary insight to develop citizens into responsible and intelligent acting consumers. In particular, it seeks to encourage Consumer Education in European secondary schools. Based on this, Consumer Classroom could develop diversified information and material resource base for teachers, for universities, for practice schools, etc. in order to contribute to teacher professional development.

In an increasingly globalised world that is currently facing environmental challenges, this will be an opportunity to explore the role of digital tools to provide teacher training on digital competences and thematic open resources, and to promote awareness and understanding regarding Climate Change and Consumer issues in order to have a positive impact, the civil society's role in the environment, climate change and the market. Awareness on Consumer rights and issues is crucial in order to ensure protection, confidence and social responsibility.

Romania, by "Aurel Vlaicu" University from Arad, specific by Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work Faculty, represented by Prof. dr. Dorin Herlo was part of the CC Project from the beginning. Taking into consideration that University prepares the future teachers for secondary schools, the interest for this project was great. But "Aurel Vlaicu" University has had the objective to share all the achievements from the project with all Romanian Universities with Educational Departments and with a lot of Secondary Schools and other beneficiaries/stakeholders from Romania.

In these terms it was interesting to observe at the end of the project, what the impact of it was, and for this reason two Focus groups were prepared and two Workshops in two Universities ("Aurel Vlaicu" from Arad and "1 Decembrie 1918" from Alba Iulia) for the teacher students and their professors.

Methodology
  ➢ The objectives of the Focus Groups and Workshops were:
    i. how to effectively use ICTs in Education by teachers in the Classroom and explain the importance of teaching Consumer Education;
    ii. illustrate how to effectively use Consumer Classroom and
    iii. a discussion on what are the teachers needing in the current digital tools for the further development of the Consumer Classroom Platform.

In Alba Iulia Unversity the event was moderated by Prof. dr. habil. Dorin Herlo ("Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, National Team Leader of Consumer Classroom European Project), during of 4 hours the workshop and was structured as it follows:
  ➢ Presentation – 20/25 minutes): https://vimeo.com/297051312
  ➢ Focus group discussion:
  • *Scenario*:
The participants are from around the globe. A digital revolution is happening and the education is impacted by digitization, machine learning, artificial intelligence and robots. The needs of the education systems have completed changed, even more so than today.
  • *Objectives:* the participants will be able to

- Share their feelings/thoughts/reactions towards this tremendous change in the education sector and teaching practice.
- Imagine which tools/initiatives/ideas could save them from an increasing gap between digital skills and the transformation of teaching and learning

- *Activities:*
  - ✓ In groups of 5 (1 assistant professor or associate professor and 4 teacher students) - 25 minutes:
    - ❖ Identify the difficulties to adapt to the changing needs and associated contextual challenges.
    - ❖ Imagine innovative tools/initiatives/ideas to identify/anticipate digital skills needs of future classrooms and students
  - ✓ In groups of 5 (1 assistant professor or associate professor and 4 teacher students) find and write the answer to the following questions - 20 minutes:
    - ❖ What is the added value of e-learning and ICT platforms to encourage the transformation of behaviours
      (i) the gap on digital skills and
      (ii) the digital transformation trends in teaching and learning?
    - ❖ How these digital tools could help teachers adapt to these rapid changes? Transformation in teaching practice. Transformation in learning: Students today are different.
  - ✓ Each of the participants please go through the platform www.consumerclassroom.eu (in EN or RO) to form an opinion about what Consumer Classroom is providing? - 20 minutes)
  - ✓ How is Consumer Classroom responding to current Consumer Education needs?
  - ✓ What are the stakeholders missing?
  - o *Methods:* exposure,
  - o heuristic conversation,
  - o demonstration,
  - o exercise,
  - o group work,
  - o computer assisted training,
  - o online evaluation,
  - o ppt presentation

At "1 Decembrie 1918" University from Alba Iulia was 20 participants

At "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad it was organized at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work, a complex activity with the title "Focus Groups & Workshop: Consumer Classroom Platform, Digital Innovation and Collaborative Tools for Teachers curated by Andrea del Pilar Giraldo Sevilla - Expertise France, Project Leader of Consumer Classroom European Project and Prof. dr. habil. Dorin Herlo – "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, National Project Coordinator of Consumer Classroom in Romania.

- *Topics*
  The main topics within the presentation were the following:
  - Consumer Education definition and context:
    - o Active citizenship due to Internet (not online or offline but onlive)
  - How Consumer Classroom responded to consumer education policy needs
  - Consumer Classroom: Addressing national and EU needs; transversality of the Consumer Themes with Curriculum Subjects; Rewarding innovative and creative use of ICTs with students (InterSchool Competition); Promoting collaboration.
  - Changing in learning (traditional generations vs digital generations)

- EdTech Revolution in Teaching
- How digital platforms could help teachers adapting to rapid changes
- Teachers required competences for the use of ICTs

- *Methodology*

Taking into consideration the time for this workshop, there was sufficient time to apply a methodology that could provide quantitative and qualitative results during the workshop itself and after.

During the workshop, it consisted on an interactive presentation software mentimenter mixed with the Wallace methodology for the creative thinking, creative problem-solving and inventive design challenging participants with problem based situations.

At the same time, the sessions were recorded with the approval of the participants in order to verify the participants behaviours and exchanges as well as double-checking the outcomes and conclusions of the workshop.

Concretely the following methods can be recalled:
- Ppt presentation,
- Wallace methodology,
- critical thinking,
- dialog,
- exposure,
- heuristic conversation,
- demonstration,
- exercise,
- group work,
- computer assisted training,
- online evaluation (from mentimeter and consumer classroom typeform)At "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad was 18 participants.

Results

At "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia
- Highlighted participants identified
  - students from psycho-pedagogical module,
  - assistant professors
  - and associate professors
- Discussion topics
  a) Tremendous changes in education today, due and IT impact. Difficulties and opportunities
  b) Imagining a future classroom, with teachers, students and tools which interact for an authentically learning (transformative learning)
  c) The impact of CC project on yourself
  d) How is CC platform responding to current consumer educational needs
  e) Stakeholders missing from the CC e-learning platform.
- Main outcomes
  1.1. All knowledge defines us like human being and the IT facilitate us to reach a lot of information. But all these information must be selected for being transformed, by understanding, into knowledge.
  1.2. Respect and develop each personality involved in education process means also the well being of the learners into the learning process.
  1.3. Due to the IT tools the learners can have a tremendous access to the other cultures. It's important to have an open, flexible and well done mind for deducing the real values of our culture and of other culture for the proper interactions between them.

That is possible by education (f2f or/and distance)

1.4. It needs the digital equipment be adequate to nowadays evolution; it's requested from the teachers to know to interact with the IT devices; it's needed that teachers change their approach to the students by responsabilising them and raising their autonomy and respect for well done task; it's needed to familiarize the students who came from villages, where they don't have access to the last technology, with the new technologies.

2.1. The classroom will have walls with touch screens that can connect everybody with everyone; the teachers will be somehow hologram; students will have the possibilities to learn from everywhere (from classroom, home, outdoor or...)

3.1. The joy to be enrolled on the CC platform because there are so many resources, different opinions and points of view about teaching and learning.

3.2. Presentation of consumer education topics by different type of subjects and from different cultures' point of view is an example of good practices for integrative learning.

3.3. The possibility of the participants to know more, how to use the platform as a future teacher.

4.1. The CC platform responds to the modern society needs, being an interactive way to have new information, well structured and it can be easily and anytime used by the teachers and students.

4.2. The CC platform improves the teachers and students perspective on consumer education, opening widely the eyes of users, in different fields.

4.3. The CC platform facilitates to the users to work in groups and to make practical things, related not only with the National Curriculum, and deliver modern and creative ways to teach.

4.4. The CC platform can also be easily used in teaching different languages, because it can adapt the given materials to teach students concepts from different areas of study.

5.1. The most important missing group is that of primary school pupils.

5.2. Can be attracted to express their point of view the producers of goods and services providers

5.3. Should involve many more countries.

- Synergies and partnership/networking opportunities
  - The debates were very fruitful, with great synergy, the participants having the floor at their disposal, for presenting their thoughts
  - The participants were willing to respond to the two online questionnaire
  - Professors from the Educational Department promised to share more the CC platform into the Alba County Schools.

At "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad

- Highlighted participants identified
  - Students from bachelor and master study program in educational sciences,
  - Assistant professors,
  - Teachers and
  - Counselors at Arad County Center for Psycho-pedagogical Counseling and
  - the Principal of Teacher Training House from Arad County
- Discussion topics
  - Conception on consumer education;
  - The role of an e-learning platform in lifelong learning;
  - The biggest challenge in Digitising Education in Romania;
  - How the digital tools could help teachers adapt to their students and the classroom?

● Main outcomes

Participants conception about Consumer Education

What words come to your mind when you hear about Consumer Education?

„Consumer education" has been defined in many different ways, clearly demonstrating the complexity of the issue, as well as the difficulty to implement education programmes in schools and for a wider audience. Approaches to consumer education also differ throughout all Member States; consumer education strategies are not well defined in most countries.
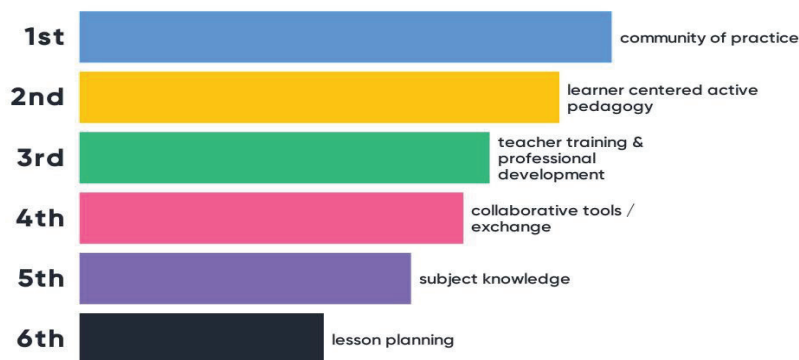
Challenging Romanian participants with their own conception of Consumer Education provided a clear basis about their understanding of this subject and their level of awareness. They were asked to define Consumer Education in 2 words maximum. Indeed the three most popular responses were concerned with: responsibility, future and awareness about the impact of consumer choices.

Still, skills and competences (i.e. knowledge, skills, critical thinking) have a second role according to the responses received. This was therefore one of the topics to further orient our work during the workshop.

What is the most useful role that an e-platform should play to promote lifelong learning?

Ranking

1st — community of practice
2nd — learner centered active pedagogy
3rd — teacher training & professional development
4th — collaborative tools / exchange
5th — subject knowledge
6th — lesson planning

The Consumer classroom project is developed within the Objective II of the Consumer Education Programme, more specifically under item "Enhancing consumer education as a life-long process with a particular focus on vulnerable consumers".

The two main objectives were the following:
a. to improve information and raise awareness of consumer rights and interest;
b. to build a knowledge and capacity for more effective consumer participation in the market.

Taking into account the responses provided, the participants situated knowledge on Consumer Education in the fifth position above the six possibilities provided. They considered that for their teaching practice an e-platform such as Consumer Classroom there should be a priority

(i) to build a community of practice,

(ii) the promotion of learner centered active pedagogy using the necessary tools, providing training to teachers and identifying the resources and methodologies needed, and

(iii) a platform that could provide teacher training and professional development.

What is the biggest challenge in Digitising Education in Romania? (describe in one word)

This question-challenge was the one that incited the greatest interest and discussion with different points of view among the participants. We could observe the following trends:

- ICT related issues: lack of tech resources (x4)
- Educational methodology issues: assessment tools, video instruction, tools for kids attention, school content – curriculum content (x2),
- Competences/Skills: emotional health (x2), human relations education
- Classroom issues: lack of respect (x3)
- Structural issues: well vs worse prepared teachers, lack of teachers, Educational System instability (x2)

Based on this the most voted challenges to which Consumer Classroom could provide responses are:

1. Lack of tech equipment/resources: Here it was told that the fact that the Inter-School Competition's prizes consisted on IT Equipment not just encouraged but it is very helpful for Romanian schools.
2. School content – Curriculum content
3. Assessment tools/video instruction/More interactive tools: this could be foreseen in the further development of the platform
4. Teachers' skills development: Consumer Classroom could provide basic training for teachers and resources for teachers to improve their competences. It was suggested that Consumer Classroom could provide a diploma for teachers that have finalized these lessons or training.

How these digital tools could help teachers adapt to their students and the classroom?
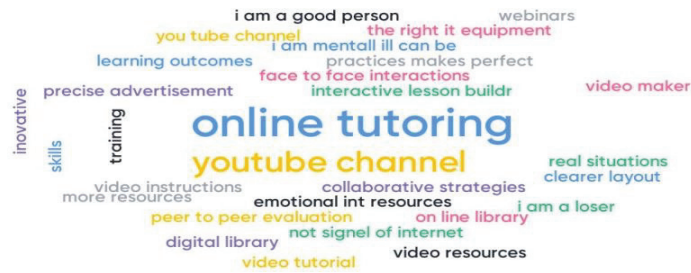
The most popular solutions of the participants are:
1. online tutoring
2. Youtube Channel that could be related with video lessons or tutorial

● Synergies and partnership opportunities
- The activities were very fruitful, with great synergy, the participants having the floor at their disposal, for presenting their thoughts.
- The groups interactions were very strong and the results very useful in their forming for the teaching job.
- The participants were willing to respond to the trainers' challenges for the mentimeter questions and as well for the two online questionnaires.
- Participant's students from Serbia and Moldova Republic promised to share their experience and the CC platform to professors and colleagues from their countries.
- Assistant professors, teachers, counselors at Arad County Center for Psycho-pedagogical Counseling and the Principal of Teacher Training House from Arad County have committed themselves to promoting the platform in their activities and to all their colleagues from secondary schools in Arad County

Conclusions

It is observed from "main outcomes" that the ideas from the activity are pertinent and the platform will play a much larger role in the future activity of the participants.

Teaching by using an e-platform such as Consumer Classroom should be a priority to build a community of practice, the promotion of learner centered active pedagogy using the necessary tools, providing training to teachers and identifying the resources and methodologies needed. A platform such as Consumer Classroom that could provide teacher training and professional development is needed.

Finally, another conclusion is that the platform should address as well to the teachers and the pupils from primary school.

Reference

Offline Promotion Report; National Promotion: *Workshop on Digital Innovation and Collaborative Tools for Teachers,* SC 2015 86 03, Reporting in line with requirements of Task 4 – Offline Promotion - Dorin Herlo; Andrea Giraldo-Sevilla