

ICT, Value Education and Social Partnerships: Promoting „Learning for the Future” in Latvia

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The greatest success of the UNESCO IITE pilot project „Learning for the Future”, which was initiated in Riga in 2012 at the International IITE/ASPnet Workshop „Smart School for the Future”, lays in its unique way of combining a technological approach with a philosophical context of “new humanism” and sustainable development, where ICTs are regarded as valuable tools for a “greater good”: humanistic and sustainable approach to education and human interaction in general. In Latvia, it has been initiated as a project for development cooperation, where every participant – student, teacher, school administrator– benefits from the experiences of schools in other countries, and most importantly, gets introduced with other cultures, lifestyles and approaches to education by the means of ICT.

Many Ways of “Learning for the Future”

Latvia in the project has been represented by four schools: Riga Classical Gymnasium, Talsi State Gymnasium and jointly Valmiera State Gymnasium and Valmiera Elementary School. Some of them emphasize the importance of intercultural dialogue by making video conferences, short films and communicating virtually on such topics as culture, traditional music and dance, national festivities and foods. Others are concentrating on sharing their experience with different ICT tools and how technology can change the school environment to promote inclusive education that responds to diverse needs of learners. These two approaches and interpretations of project guidelines complement each other: they combine the values based education with ICTs in education to promote the sustainable development, where technological and pedagogical progress goes hand in hand.

The Role of Social Partnerships

In order to fully implement the ideas and aims of the pilot project “Learning for the Future” a special advisory council was created that gathers representatives from state institutions, as well as from the higher educational institutions and private sector. This system has helped the schools to find social partners in the education sector that mutually benefits from the involvement in the project. For example, Valmiera Elementary School have organized a large scale conference on ICTs in education in partnership with National Centre for Education and enterprise “Lielvārds”, as well as University of Latvia – all of these institutions are represented in the project council. The lesson learned from the implementation of the pilot project “Learning for the Future” is to not underestimate the power of different boards, councils and other advisory bodies. This structure opens the dialogue between schools and other institutions and brings together people with different experiences and views on education.

Sharing Good Practices

UNESCO Associated School Project (UNESCO ASPnet) is a strong and flourishing network for schools to cooperate globally and on a national level. It includes almost 10 000 educational institutions worldwide that are ready to face the difficult challenges of the 21st century and promote global citizenship and sustainable development. Currently there are 20 very active members of this network in Latvia. Each one of them is involved in one of the three thematic directions of the project in Latvia: heritage education, human rights and values education or education for sustainable development. Initiating the pilot project “Learning for the future” in Latvia, we involved UNESCO ASPnet schools from different thematic directions, so that each one of them could find their special niche of “Learning for the Future”. This allowed us to spread the ideas, experience stories and challenges further: we included the experience stories of schools as well as information on the project in UNESCO ASPnet seminars and meetings on a national level. The project results have been very well received and have become an integral part of the UNESCO ASPnet activities on international, as well as national level.

“We must become the change we want to see in the world.”

/Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

To introduce our vision on how technology can benefit to the values education, Latvian National Commission organized a contest for schools “Make Your ABC” where students “imitated” the first ABC in Latvian language that was written in 18th century by G.F. Stenders – Lutheran priest, grammarian, lexicographer and founder of Latvian secular literature. Schools of pilot project “Learning for the Future” actively took part in the contest.

The idea of the contest was simple: children and young people draw the image of the letter on an interactive board and, most importantly, they had to give a special message/valuable advice to their peers (for more information, please visit www.darini.lv). Results were quite surprising. Even though this contest promoted the meaningful use of ICT in education, encouraged creativity, peer learning and group work, many messages/ advices were quite negative towards using ICTs: children often stressed that their peers should put away their phones, computers, tablet PC' s and read more books, write with pens, do sports, go outside with friends and play board games. There was a general sense of guilt of using ICTs. It seemed like in minds of schoolchildren ICT was excluded from their vision of learning process in school and was regarded as an obstacle and source of distraction. Of course, the influence of teacher in the process of applying and making works for the contest cannot be underestimated, at the same time these results made us think about how we position ICTs in education today: as a meaningful tool that promotes the deeper learning and understanding of the curricula or as an object for entertainment and keeping the attention of children in the class?

Ideas, guidelines, experiences of the pilot project “Learning for the Future”, as well as methodological materials provided by the UNESCO IITE give us all chances to integrate ICTs in education smartly, meaningfully and creatively. Now it is the mastery of teachers and responsibility of schools, communities and the State to use them right.