

TOWARDS ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP USING ICT

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present the achieved results and the lessons learned from a Grundtvig II Learning Partnership entitled “Active Citizenship”, that focus on the use of innovative application of ICT tools with the purpose to further active citizenship. We present the methodologies that we applied while teaching Informatics at the Second Chance School of Corfu, which evolved around three axes; active citizens are informed, open-minded and act locally while thinking globally. Our overall aim was not merely to teach our adult learners ICT skills, but to motivate them to embrace ICT as means to alter their daily attitude.

Introduction

The Second Chance Schools in Greece target to establish places where knowledge is produced through the direct and active involvement of learners in the learning process. They seek to cooperate with social organizations and follow pedagogical approaches that focus on the individual needs and interests of learners. Particular emphasis is placed on acquiring basic knowledge and skills in new technologies, while fostering social skills, which combined contribute to form an attitude of being an active citizen. To achieve these targets, the curriculum is flexible and allows teachers and learners to explore various social scenes where they can acquire knowledge (Ministry of Education - GSLL, 2008).

In the Second Chance School of Corfu we seek the involvement in various projects and partnerships in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives. Under these projects we apply teaching methods, which enable learners to participate in experiential activities, enabling observation, discussion, reflection and critical work in groups. One of the main objectives of these activities is to familiarise learners with the use and exploitation of new technologies and ICT tools; such use is not an end in itself and does not draw the attention on the ICT tools.

Our school following its policy to participate in various projects is the coordinator partner of the Grundtvig II Learning Partnership “Active Citizenship” that is carrying out under the umbrella of Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) that has been established by the European Commission since 2007. LLP’s priority is to reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to active citizenship, intercultural

dialogue and to support the development of innovative ICT-based content, pedagogical methods and practices.

In this paper we first present our partnership, whose main aim was to exchange experiences on methods for defining and promoting active citizenship and European awareness, and its objectives. We place emphasis on the specific objectives on which we focused at our school and how we achieved them through the innovative application and use of ICT tools. Next we present the applied methodologies and the exploited ICT tools, which evolved around three axes: active citizens are informed, open-minded and citizens that act locally while thinking globally. Our overall aim was not merely to teach our learners ICT skills, but to motivate them to embrace ICT as means to alter their daily attitude and to become active citizens. Finally we conclude by evaluating our experiences and reflecting on the lessons learned from the use of technology in education promoting active citizenship.

The “Active Citizenship” Partnership

Since the year 2000, the EU with the Grundtvig I action has offered a framework for European cooperation in the field of Lifelong Learning and Adult Education. The overarching priority of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) has been to reinforce the contribution made by education and training to achieving the Lisbon goal of making the EU the most competitive knowledge-based economy, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion. Among the priorities of LLP have been the support of lifelong learning, the reinforcement of collaboration among parts of the education system and the support of the acquisition of key competences, such as ICT skills (European Commission – Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2006).

The “Active Citizenship” Grundtvig II Learning Partnership was formed, among two Second Chance Schools in Greece and two Language Centres for foreigners in Sweden and Denmark, under the revised LLP umbrella in 2007, aiming to exchange experiences on methods for defining and promoting active citizenship constituents, such as cultural awareness and intercultural dialogue, environmental awareness, language and job training. Using collaborative methods and encouraging communication among educators and learners the partnership seeks to promote the exchange and dissemination of innovative practices in adult education and the development of new pedagogical methodologies through the use of ICT technologies and tools (Greek State Scholarships Foundation, 2006), (ACT, 2007).

Our partnership aims to develop new approaches and methods that will fight social exclusion and marginalization and at the same time will further intercultural awareness and dialogue; key component in this process is the strengthening of the

learners' communication skills, thus we seek to promote their ability to acquire information and actively take part in social and cultural life and public debate using ICT tools. In order to achieve these, we have set a number of specific objectives, such as enabling intercultural dialogue and exchange of experiences between learners using ICT technologies, as well as strengthening their communication and presentation skills using ICT tools.

The profile of the Second Chance School of Corfu is that of a school for adult learners that have not finished compulsory education; the curriculum follows that of a typical high school, but particular emphasis is given on ICT skills. During this partnership we selected to work on strengthening learners' communication skills and ICT competencies, targeting to promote the notion of active citizenship. Following, we present a few definitions of active citizenship, how education for citizenship can be fulfilled, our perception for active citizenship and the methodologies that we applied.

Pursuing Active Citizenship by Learning ICT

According to the curriculum of our school the lesson of informatics is entitled "Computing Literacy" and targets to assist learners to become digitally literate. The scope of this lesson is fairly wide and open allowing us to adapt to learners' needs and capabilities. In the context of the "Active Citizenship" partnership we had the chance to teach ICT through an alternative perception; we did not merely teach learners ICT skills, but we motivated them to embrace ICT as means to alter their daily attitude and to become active citizens.

Active Citizenship in Adult Education

According to Cecchini (2003) learning for active citizenship means becoming aware of one's rights and responsibilities and developing the capability for participation in society. Schugurensky (2001) emphasises that adult education for active citizenship refers to the development of critical citizens who are not only able to participate in social life, but are also willing to.

An early classification on how to teach citizenship by Blyth (1984) identifies three forms: education about citizenship, which seeks to provide knowledge and understanding of history and structures of civil life; education through citizenship, which utilises active and participative experiences in the school and local community; and finally education for citizenship, which attempts to encompass the other two forms. Contemporary educational thinking stresses the need to enable the "education for citizenship" approach.

For the Council of Europe education for democratic citizenship should (i) equip people to play an active part in public life and to shape in a responsible way their own destiny and that of their society, (ii) aim to instil a culture of human rights which will ensure full respect for those rights and understanding of responsibilities that flow from them, and (iii) prepare people to live in a multicultural society and to deal with difference knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally (Duerr et al., 2000). In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, education for active citizenship has to be a form of *literacy*, in order to develop knowledge, understanding and critical thinking, has to imply *action*, in order to be able and willing to use acquired knowledge and skills, and has to be based on *values*, like human rights, respect for diversity, responsibility. Learning for citizenship, therefore, includes cognitive (knowledge), pragmatic (action), and affective (values) aspects (Cecchini, 2003).

Based on the above we selected to evolve our work in this partnership around three axes. Active citizens are informed as they seek knowledge and critical awareness. They are open-minded as they respect values, like human rights, diversity, and they understand their culture, join to intercultural dialogue and can be members of multicultural societies. Finally they are citizens that act locally while thinking globally, as they develop skills and competencies of communication, participation and responsible action.

Our Foundation

The ICT tools and applications that we selected to exploit in order to educate learners for citizenship followed the three axes mentioned above and were based mainly on Selwyn (2003, 2007) and Duffy and Bruns (2006). Specifically according to Selwyn (2003) one of the applications of technology in teaching citizenship has always been the use of ICT as a source of citizenship information and as a means of taking part in citizenship discussion and debate. Selwyn (2003) also notes that the creation of learner-produced digital content that is tangible to the learners promotes both cultural awareness and intercultural dialogue. Moreover, Duffy and Bruns (2006) are in favour of the use of blogs and wikis as they favour dialogue and collaboration.

In the next sections we present the evolution of our work around the three axes and how we used ICT tools and applications aiming both to educate for citizenship and to digital literate our learners.

Active Citizens are Informed

The first axis around which our work evolved is strongly related to the cognitive aspect of learning for citizenship. Our main target was to contribute to the

development of citizens who are well informed and are critically aware of the upcoming issues; our target was that learners would acquire the knowledge and self-awareness of becoming informed citizens. Informed citizens are the ones who have both the ability to find knowledge and information and to critically review and understand it.

Search Engines

According to Selwyn (2003) one of the applications of technology in teaching citizenship has always been the use of ICT as a source of citizenship information. As the World Wide Web, from here on called the Web, is probably the most important source of information we set as one of our targets to provide learners with the ability to seek information in the Web. In order to achieve our goal we set off by assisting learners to learn how to use major search engines, like Google, in order to seek information. We emphasised that they should cross examine their results, compare different angles of view on the given topic and rate the authenticity of their sources — e.g. a government agency versus a forum.

Blogs

We did not merely focus on the search engines and their use, though, but we also tried to exploit various online media, like blogs, encyclopaedias, etc. Through the creation of blogs we taught learners a skill and a way of expression that has become very popular with the advent of Web 2.0, but also we wanted learners to become aware of the process and accountability of publishing on a medium that is open to the public and to discussion. Particularly important was the fact that blogs technology favours dialogue (Duffy & Bruns, 2006), a citizenship virtue that we wanted to promote, based on written text, a medium that learners had not been accustomed to exploit. This is in line with the remark that Selwyn (2003) makes that the application of ICT is also identified as a means of taking part in citizenship discussion and debate, primarily through the development of ICT simulations of social situations with the aim of stimulating discussion amongst learners.

Wikis

The next step for active citizens, after the collection and examination of knowledge and the discussion that leads to conclusions, is to disseminate the result; for this the use of a wiki was selected. As Duffy and Bruns (2006) point out wikis can be used for students to add summaries of their thoughts, building collaborative results, especially due to the ability they offer to students to edit and comment on the content directly. Our work on the use of wikis was actually a three step process, beginning with studying wikis already in use, most notably Wikipedia (el.wikipedia.org), following with getting acquainted with structure and

syntax of wiki software (MediaWiki), and finally by truly exploiting a wiki in order to publicise their opinions.

During the first step, our specific goals included not only getting to know Wikipedia and identifying it as a useful source of information, but also to understand that there are various user roles and to realise the open character that this brings along. Having realised that they could contribute to enrich the content of a wiki, learners became acquainted with the wiki language, they started contributing their content, they took on the role of checking the content for soundness, and they organised their content using links among logical concepts. Finally, in the third step, they could plan and organise a special purpose wiki working collaboratively and actively participate to a community.

Active Citizens are Open-Minded

The second axis around which our work evolved is strongly related to the affective aspect of learning for citizenship. We wanted learners to respect values, like human rights and diversity, to understand their culture, to join intercultural dialogue and be able to be members of multicultural societies.

Country Portfolios

In this axe we started by involving learners in the collaborative creation of a country's portfolio using ICT technologies like the Web and presentation software. The points that they wanted to focus were decided using brainstorming, the workload was then divided and altogether they produced a portfolio that reflected their perception of their country and culture. The portfolios that were created among all partner institutions were exchanged, compared and discussed.

Recipes Booklets

Next, having already had an initial communication among the institutions' learners, we used a common celebration date, the Christmas period, that reflects the local culture and at the same time the existence of similar traditions throughout Europe shows that this is an intercultural tradition. In order to help learners identify the cultural similarities among countries we involved them in an unofficial intercultural dialogue by asking them to prepare and exchange a small booklet of local Christmas recipes and traditions.

During this project learners exploited simple tools, like a word processor, a scanner and a simple image processing tool in order to prepare their recipes, and they had to collaborate in order to put together all the material that they produced. To take part in an intercultural dialogue with the other partnership institutions the booklets had to be translated in a common language; for this they initially used

online translation tools, like Google translate, realised their limitations and worked on refining the result. The exchange of booklets spurred intercultural dialogue through the comparison of customs and the identification of similarities and differences.

Both the country portfolios and the recipes booklets have been especially appropriate for the application of ICT in the classroom (Selwyn, 2003) as they allowed the creation of learner-produced digital content that was tangible to the learners and promoted cultural awareness and intercultural dialogue. So far the content that the learners had created can be characterised as cultural products which did not focus on citizenship; that was our next target.

Producing a Video of a Theatrical Play

In cooperation with the arts class learners produced a theatrical play; specifically they selected the ancient comedy “Lysistrata” of Aristophanes that embraces various virtues of active citizenship. The story of “Lysistrata” speaks out about virtues like peace and women rights; it shows that people can even stop a war if they organise themselves and act as a team for the common benefit and it also addresses the contribution of women to society and policy making.

From the ICT point of view our target was to disseminate this play among all partnership institutions. Learners initially recorded the play using digital video-cameras and experienced the procedure of transferring material between electronic devices. Then they had the opportunity to create their own video in order to produce a DVD for the theatrical play; they used video and audio editing tools. As the main aim was to disseminate this DVD it was critical to be subtitled; so they translated the text and wrote subtitles for the DVD using the software developed by the Learning via Subtitling (LeViS) project (Papadakis & Papadimitriou, 2008).

Active Citizens Act Locally and Think Globally

The final axis around which our work evolved is strongly related to the pragmatic aspect of learning for citizenship. Our target was to encourage learners to take up action on issues that are important on their local community but at the same time have a greater significance that goes beyond the local perspective. For this we assisted them in participating in the discussion of controversial public issues by publishing their positions online, contacting local authorities and requesting official responses.

Contacting the Local Authorities

In order to initiate a discussion on a burning issue of the local community, the management of wastes, we presented learners a documentary on the

mismanagement of electronic waste entitled “Digital Cemeteries” (Exandas, 2007). A discussion followed around what happens in the local community that led to deciding to contact the local authorities. Initially, learners were divided in small groups and each group attempted to collect relevant information from local municipalities via personal contact. When this failed, mainly due to lack of knowledge concerning this issue from the municipalities, they collaborated in order to officially contact them via e-mail and to demand information; the progress of this attempt was also published on the school website as a means to provoke reaction from the officials.

The outcome of this process was that learners realised that when they act as a united group they can achieve positive results and cannot be ignored. Although initially the local authorities did not respond to a citizen’s request, when this became a public demand they had to respond responsibly; some municipalities even requested our learners assistance and cooperation in raising awareness on this issue among public.

Creating a Leaflet on Recycling

The issue of waste management and recycling was a burning issue for the municipality that hosted our school. As a result of the previous action, the mayor accepted our learners’ proposal to support and fund the production of a leaflet on recycling. Learners used tools like the Web, word processor and image editing in order to design their leaflet. Particular effort was given to produce a professional looking result since this would be printed and handed out to citizens of the whole municipality; this was a strong motive to come up with an elegant result that would inspire citizens to follow this paradigm.

Since this was a leaflet on recycling and reduction of waste, learners proposed that it should be handed out in a manner that it would not end up to be just more garbage. For this they organised a campaign that they personally handed out the leaflets, encouraging recipients to study them, discuss on the issue and hand out more leaflets responsibly. This whole procedure helped them develop skills of participation and responsible action and also stimulated interest in engaging effectively in democratic processes of decision-making in their own communities (Selwyn, 2007).

Teaching Strategy

The learning procedure that we followed was dictated by the fact that our learners were adults, thus they wish to participate in the learning process and we should strive to structure it based on their experiences, perceptions and previous knowledge (Jarvis, 2004). We wished to develop a learning environment where

we, as teachers, were not regarded as ‘the fount of all knowledge’, but instead knowledge and skills flourished through collaborative activities in a learning engagement among teachers and learners. Furthermore, we had to accept that there was a significant diversity in educational biographies and background of our learners, thus they should be encouraged to learn at their own pace, and possibly select the activities they would be involved more. Thus the activities that we designed in order to teach ICT skills built on the experiential learning approach (Kolb & Fry, 1975), which according to Rogers (1969) also has a quality of personal involvement and is self-initiated.

Regarding the values and attitudes relevant to being an active citizen that we wanted our learners to develop, the approach that we followed was in line with the transformative learning theory of Mezirow. According to Mezirow (1977, 1981, 2000) everyone has constructions of reality which are dependent on his socio-cultural world. These constructions of reality “perspectives” are transformed when they are in disjunction with an individual’s new experience. The result of such a situation is the individual’s reflection upon the experience, the transformation of his perspective and the plot of new strategy of living. The activities that we designed and applied aimed to face our learners with situations where they should reflect upon their perspectives, critical assess them and explore new ways of acting, thus transforming themselves from citizens to active citizens.

Teaching Methods

Our goal was twofold: to teach ICT skills and to develop an active citizen attitude. Therefore among the teaching methods that we selected some favored more the former cause and others the latter. We used various teacher-centred methods; the demonstration was suitable in order to introduce and present a new tool when teaching ICT skills, whereas the guided discussion was preferable whenever citizenship issues came up. Additionally we exploited student-centred group methods; brainstorming and debate were particularly suitable to teach citizenship but we adapted them by conducting the learners’ dialogue via the blogs and the wiki thus we managed to exploit them to teach also ICT skills. For the most demanding activities we selected to follow the project teaching method, where learners worked in groups, they learn by doing and they could use the results in a practical manner.

Learning goals and objectives. According to Cecchini (2003) learning for citizenship includes cognitive (knowledge), pragmatic (action), and affective (values) aspects; the three axes around which we evolved our work attempted to address all the aforementioned aspects. One can identify the relevance between these aspects and the three domains of educational objectives that Bloom (1956) identifies; cognitive, affective and psychomotor. As Bloom proposes we attempted to follow a holistic form of education by setting goals relevant to the knowledge

that our learners would acquire the skills they would develop and the attitudes they would embrace.

Table 1 lists the most representative learning objectives relevant to teaching ICT, based on Bloom's taxonomy. More specific learning objectives have been set for each learning activity; a more detailed description can be found on (Ringas & Christopoulou, 2009). Additionally, a number of learning objectives relevant to citizenship were set. Among them the most notable belong to the Affective domain. We encouraged our learners to adopt debate and discussion on their everyday lives, practice the use of new means of expression and become able to defend, adopt or drop opinions on citizenship. They were assisted to realise their culture and its values and to embrace an open attitude towards other cultures. They were motivated to engage in organising a campaign in their local community aiming to encourage others to become active citizenship and to press the authorities to take action.

Table 1: Selected ICT Learning Objectives

Cognitive (Knowledge)	Psychomotor (Skills)	Affective (Attitudes)
<p>To acquaint with common ICT tools; like word processor, presentation software and image, audio and video processing tools</p> <p>To comprehend the structure of the Internet and the need for search engines</p> <p>To be aware that Web 2.0 content is rich but may not be credible</p> <p>To define multimedia applications and identify their components</p> <p>To comprehend the advantages of digital content, especially its ability to transfer it among devices</p>	<p>To practice typing and editing of texts</p> <p>To search and collect information from the Internet</p> <p>To publish content on the web via blogs and wikis</p> <p>To communicate via e-mail</p> <p>To digitise content and transfer it among devices</p> <p>To edit images, audio, video and to create multimedia applications</p>	<p>To embrace online resources as a means of information</p> <p>To become aware of the process and accountability of publishing on an open medium</p> <p>To participate in a group and to work collaboratively</p> <p>To adopt common ICT tools as a means to create complex products</p> <p>To adopt ICT tools in order to communicate and exchange opinions</p>

Lessons Learned and Empirical Data

In retrospect, the involvement in this Grundtvig learning partnership has been fruitful and has offered us the opportunity to explore innovative methodologies of teaching ICT. In this section we discuss the experiences we gained and present the learning outcome based on the aforementioned goals. In general most of our activities were successful, especially due to learners' enthusiasm and involvement in both studying ICT and working on active citizenship. Our major finding is that the activities which were product oriented and were implemented as projects produced better learning outcomes. We reckon that a reason for this result is that such activities have a tangible goal that can be identified by learners and can be better assessed and evaluated.

Specifically during the activities on blogs and wikis we found out that learners feel more comfortable to publish their opinions and comment on them when they have already worked on a topic and are familiar with its various aspects. Learners did not face any difficulties publishing on the Web using blogs or wikis, however they did not become accustomed to writing on blogs as a daily routine; they exploited this medium only when significant issues emerged and discussion arose. On the other hand wikis had a different result; as soon as we solved an initial hesitation due to uncertainty on their writing skills by installing a plugin for language spell checking, learners were willing to use them and a community was formed.

The product-oriented activities, i.e. country portfolios, recipes booklets and leaflet on recycling, although they required more ICT skills, they were more successful possibly because their target was tangible and more conceivable. Learners felt more up to designing and creating the products that were meant to be exchanged among the partners; whereas when designing the leaflet that was for public use they asked for more assistance and guidance. Particularly in the case of the DVD for the theatrical play the required technical skills were more demanding and thus fewer were interested to be involved. It should be noted that although learners were acquainted with forms of multimedia content editing, like image and audio processing, they faced difficulties when they had to combine all these and use a more advanced video editing tool.

We believe that most of the learning objectives related to ICT which we had set were achieved. Regarding the goals on active citizenship, the objective to enable our learners to access and assess information has been clearly successful as well as the ones related to communication, discussion, acceptance of diversity, etc. Most important of all was the fact that learners were indeed involved in organising a campaign for a public issue and they motivated both local authorities and public.

Concluding we would like to note that the involvement in such programs allows for the adoption of innovative approaches that are desirable when teaching ICT as otherwise the lesson can be trivial focusing on the mere demonstration of ICT tools. Through such learning processes learners can change their attitudes towards ICT and adopt them to their everyday lives.

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