



“What is good practice in e-learning 2008 in formal education?” – Outcomes of the panel discussion organised during the LEMAIA Working Session on 18th of February 2008 at the Centre for Social Innovation – ZSI in Vienna

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Background

On the 18th of February 2008 the LEMAIA project consortium organised an international forum to exchange good practices and experiences made in the area of e-learning. The LEMAIA Working Session, which took place at the ZSI, brought together 14 participants coming from 4 European countries and representing different educational contexts i.e. schooling, higher education and vocational training. The participants came from different fields of e-learning application and research i.e. e-learning organisation (strategies, curricula), e-learning diffusion, e-learning pedagogical and technological issues, econtent repositories, social software, teacher training.

The session was structured around one guiding question: **“What is good practice in e-learning 2008 in formal education?”**

During the session the examples of application of e-learning in different contexts and areas of formal education were presented and discussed in an international context with special focus on the challenges to be met in the closest future. The presentations served as a basis for a panel discussion which was the last item on the meeting’s agenda. Each panellist concentrated on answering the guiding question from the perspective of his/her area of practice. Issues related to teacher training were especially stressed. Below are presented the major outcomes of the panel discussion.

What is good practice in e-learning 2008 in formal education?

The following set of questions had to be addressed by each partner: what kinds of challenges need to be met in the closest future in my area of research/e-learning application, if we are to talk about good practices? What kinds of criteria define good practice in 2008? What are the shortcomings of today’s approaches? What are the possible solutions for the problems identified? What are future trends in e-learning?

As already mentioned above the panellists were coming from different areas of e-learning application (e-learning organisation, e-learning diffusion, e-learning pedagogical and technological issues, econtent repositories, social software, teachers’ training) and different teaching/learning contexts (schooling, higher education, vocational training). This approach facilitated to grasp those challenges and problems that are common for all areas of e-learning application, while, at the same time, allowed for analysing them from different angles and perspectives.

The panel discussion was organised in two main blocks: 1) Challenges, 2) Suggested solutions.

Challenges

After intensive discussion the panellists agreed that the main challenges for e-learning in the next few years include:

1) Organisation:

- a) Awareness raising amongst decision makers regarding the need for changes in educational system, if e-learning is to be implemented more widely and more effectively;
- b) Closing the bridge between rigid school/university educational structures and flexible learning approaches fostering self-regulation and self-direction;
- c) Closing the bridge between “school science” and “life science”;
- d) Evaluating the effectiveness of new practices.

2) Social changes:

- a) Enhancing digital literacy among older teachers and facilitating the process of entering into the teaching practice for younger teachers;
- b) Changing teachers’ attitude to e-learning: convincing teachers about the utility and powerfulness of e-learning;
- c) Changing learners’ attitude towards learning: making the learners take responsibility over their own learning, supporting self-direction and self-organisation.

3) Tools:

- a) Making larger use of social software in educational context;
- b) Designing tools in a more user-friendly way;
- c) Improving technical infrastructures at educational institutions.

4) eContent:

- a) Making content attractive for learners;
- b) Making content more accessible for teachers.

Solutions

The suggested solutions for the challenges/problems described above include:

1) Organisation:

- a) Wider diffusion of information on e-learning among different stakeholders and decision makers;
- b) Practice oriented approach to teaching and learning – appropriate changes have to be made to curricula, school books, and teachers’ training;
- c) Supporting flexible structures at schools, e.g cancelling of 50min classroom environment, developing new systems of assessment – assessment of learning should be replaced by assessment for learning;
- d) Developing systems for validation and evaluation of implemented innovations in teaching.

2) Social changes:

- a) In and out service teaching: (i) offering of good training for teachers on e-learning tools; (ii) development of an infrastructure for teachers’ support at schools – school structures should support learning by doing/trial and error approach so that teachers feel comfortable to try new things out (iii) giving teachers

the opportunity to become e-learners before they become e-teachers;

- b) Encouraging teachers to share good practice examples among themselves (e.g. through dedicated websites, conferences, workshops). Peer-to-peer demonstration of successful e-learning applications motivates teachers much more than any “up-bottom” recommendations from educational researchers or educational authorities;
- c) Changes in teaching/learning practice are of utmost importance. They include: (i) creating challenging learning situations – collaborative and communicative settings are most effective and highly motivational, (ii) acknowledging that people can organise themselves and recognising that each learner has different needs, skills and attitudes, (iii) creating rich learning environments offering learners some control over their learning and the possibility to follow individual learning paths – solutions for learners with special needs should also be at place (iv) promoting the change of teaching/learning practices should take place already in primary school.

3) **Tools:**

- a) Social software, which is highly successful among Internet users, has to be investigated more closely and the tools should be tried out and adopted in educational scenarios;
- b) User-centred design;
- c) This is also an organisational challenge. It is important to inform stakeholders about shortcomings of existing technical infrastructures at educational settings and in this way promote change.

4) **eContent:**

- a) Financial support for schools in order to purchase highly motivational teaching/learning materials which bring science closer to life; Creating challenging learning situations for learners that are motivating enough and promote self-direction and self-organisation;
- b) Financial support – as above; Structuring content into small, atomic pieces, so that teachers can easily design their lessons out of it.

List of participants

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